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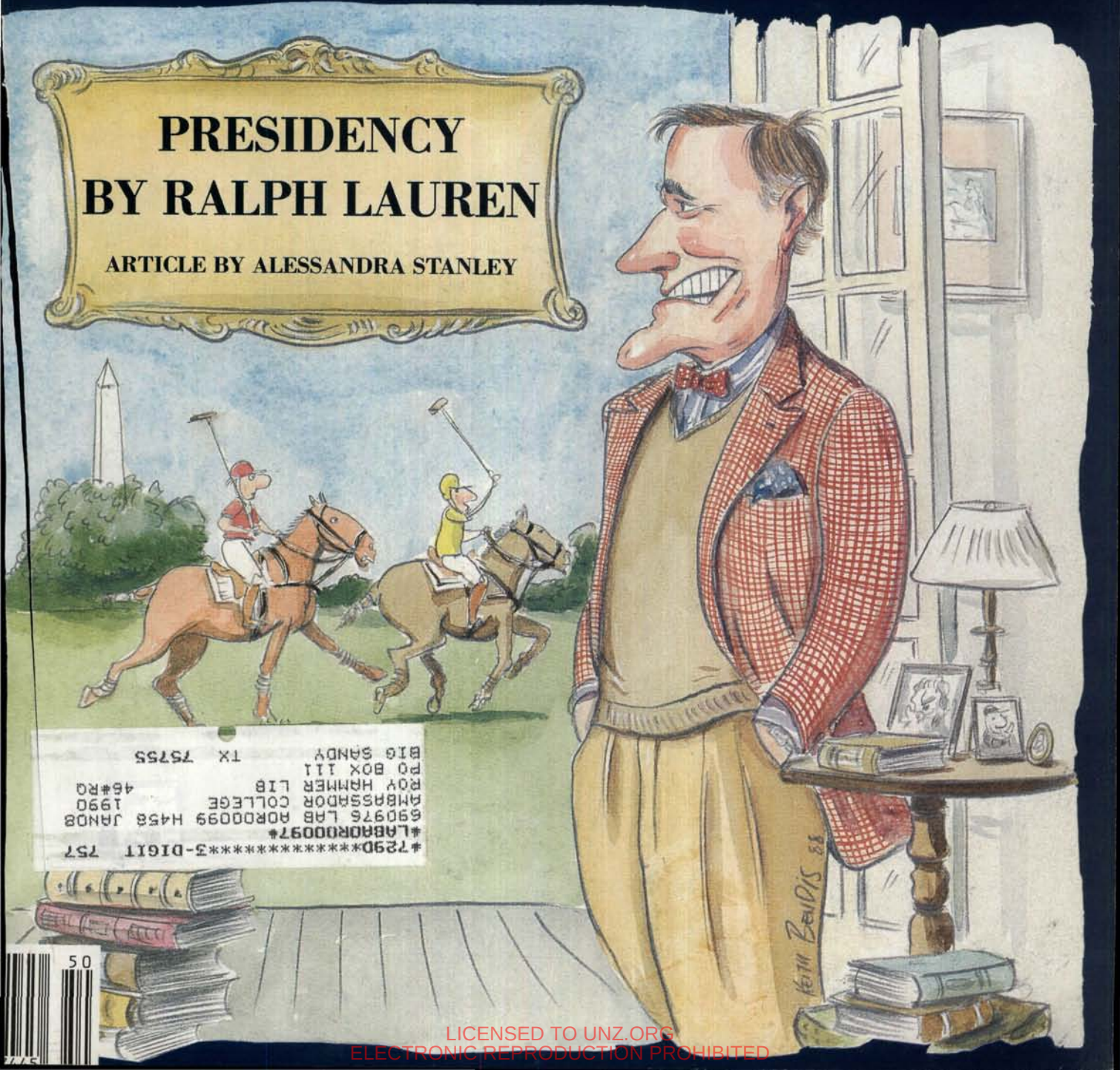

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FROM WASHINGTON

COME TO UNCLE

Whither Canada? That is the question millions of Americans, as usual, have not been asking in recent weeks, as Canadians fought a bitter election campaign over the fate of a free trade agreement with the United States. But at least a few die-hard internationalists have felt guilty about it. Now that Canadians have implicitly approved the agreement by re-electing Prime Minister Brian Mulroney, we can put all thoughts of Canada aside without guilt.

But should we? I think not. Canada needs us. Indeed it's hard not to suspect that in briefly threatening to reject this obviously sensible treaty, Canada—as is so often the case with stagy suicide attempts—was simply trying to draw attention to itself. The entire election was a cry for help.

It was the conceit of the treaty's opponents that free trade is a nefarious plot by Americans to swallow Canada in our embrace and turn it into a 51st state. It was the conceit of the treaty's supporters that this was the last thing any Canadian would wish. In reality, there can't be 100 Americans from sea to shining sea with the slightest desire to annex Canada as a 51st state. So, doctor, whence this recurrent nightmare about being swallowed up by America? Well, it doesn't take a Ph.D. in psychology to realize that Canadians' mock horror at the thought of becoming part of the United States actually masks a deep desire to do precisely that. They protest too much. Their lips say "no, no," but their eyes say "yes, yes."

Anyone who has ever conversed with Canadians will have witnessed their psychological torment. They combine a deep professed disdain for south-of-the-border culture—our crime, our squalor, our imperial bravado, our skeletal social welfare system—with an even deeper need for approval from Americans. They write letters to the editor of American publications at the slightest hint of a slight. They're notorious for their inability to take a joke. Clearly they're all torn up inside. They desperately want love, but are unable to supply it in return.

There is only one cure for this complex neurosis. We must purge it once and for all by giving Canadians what they secretly want. We must embrace them, adopt them, love them, annex them. In short, we must make Canada the 51st state. Or, perhaps, the 51st through 54th states, depending on the best arrangement of stars in the revised American flag.

I hear you saying, "Not so fast, buster." Why should we share our flag—the very symbol over which dozens of political consultants fought valiantly in our own recent election—with 25 million foreigners? Don't we have millions of humorless neurotics of our own, in desperate need of teasing, who won't get the attention they deserve if our society is suddenly overwhelmed by Canadians? "Love thy neighbor" is an admirable injunction, but Americans—selfish beasts that we are—naturally are going to wonder, "What's in this for us?"

Although it never occurred to me that Canada should become the 51st state until Canadians began insisting hysterically—and unconvincingly—that they don't want to be one, now that they've brought it up I can see that such an arrangement would have many advantages for the United States as well. Indeed, the idea of annexing Canada could have appeal for Americans across the political spectrum: —*Woolly left-wing one-worlders* should appreciate the erasure of any international border, no matter how faint or porous it is already. We are all fellow passengers on spaceship earth, are we not? The merging of the United States and Canada would be a great spur to conferences, proclamations, and suchlike activities celebrating the irrelevance of nationalism in the postindustrial age. Oh goody. —*Right-wing American nativists, white racists, and so on* ought to relish the prospect of a vast infusion of Anglo-Saxon stock into the American melting pot. There is Quebec to worry about—Americans have always thought of the French as somebody else's problem—and Toronto has become alarmingly multiethnic in recent years. However, the majority of Canadians are still of British descent and have relatively ancient roots in North American soil. In an era when Mexico seems to be annexing itself to the United States

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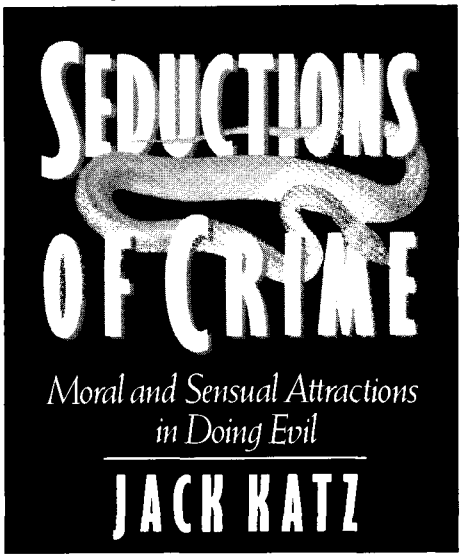

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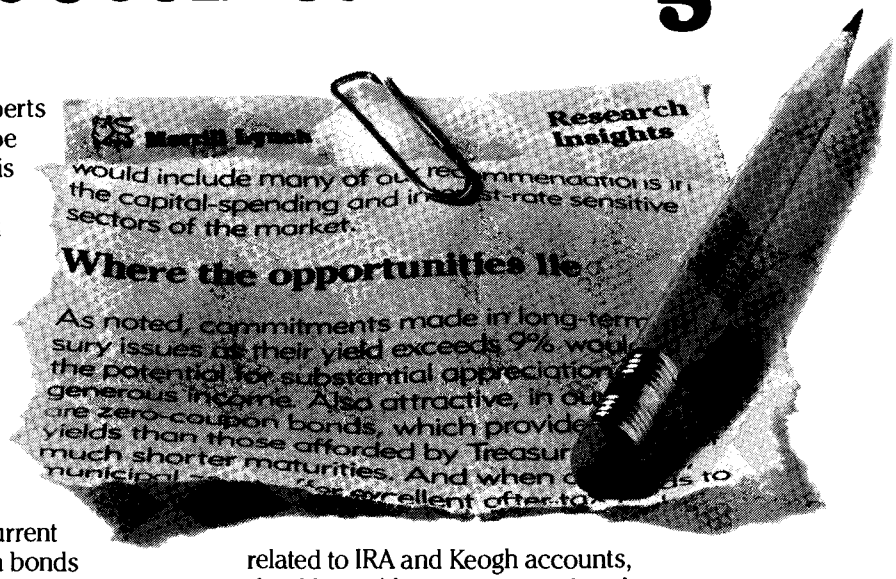
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would include many of our recommendations in the capital-spending and interest-rate sensitive sectors of the market.
Where the opportunities lie
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the potential for substantial appreciation
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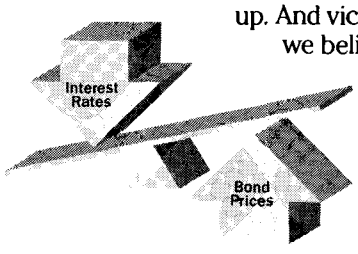

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CORRESPONDENCE

CHILE REALITY

To the editors:

It is sad that you would print Arturo Cruz's article "The General's Election" (October 31). Contrary to his statement that "the history of Chile has come full circle, returning the country to the path of stability and prosperity," Chile has experienced no real change since the plebiscite of October 5. Pinochet has not been "deposed," as Cruz affirms. In fact he remains in control and concentrates more power than any constitutional president could ever have. The secret police and the armed forces, the only real power, are under Pinochet's own command. There are more than 600 political prisoners, torture continues under the armed forces, unemployment reached over 30 percent, the rates of malnutrition and death due to lack of medical attention are at the highest ever. There are over one million exiles who cannot return to Chile because they have no jobs there. Increases in the suicide rate, prostitution, drug addiction, and alcoholism are registering higher marks than in past years under Pinochet. Reliable analyses reveal that over 40 percent of the population lives under the poverty level. Two days after the plebiscite three people were killed by Pinochet's forces. Over 40,000 people have been killed by the dictatorship in Chile, not "4,000." Is this "stability and prosperity"? In any case, it is no "leftist myth."

ENRIQUE RIVEROS-SCHÄFER
Los Angeles, California

WORLD BANG

To the editors:

Jeffrey Sachs stated correctly that Congress recently authorized the U.S. share of the World Bank's $74.8 billion capital increase, but he got his numbers wrong ("Baker's Bank Bailout," November 14). The U.S. share is indeed $13.8 billion, to be met over the next six years. But of this amount, only $420 million—three percent—is to be paid in cash, and the congressional vote that authorized the U.S. subscription only appropriated $50 million as the first-year payment. Furthermore, the total amount of "U.S. taxpayer money" that has gone into the World Bank over its 42-year history comes to only $1.6 billion.

Sachs may speculate about whether the U.S. Treasury has been trying to exercise pressure on the World Bank in one direction or another. However, one thing should be made clear: a $1.6 billion cash outlay by the United States resulted in more than $157 billion of lending over the past 42 years, a substantial share of which generated U.S. exports. That's a lot of "bang for the buck."

AMEDEE S. PROUVOST
Washington, D.C.

Jeffrey Sachs replies:

U.S. taxpayers will effectively guarantee $13.8 billion of new World Bank borrowing from the private capital markets; money the Bank will relend to debtor countries. If the debtors repay the World Bank loans, taxpayer costs will be small; if they default, those costs can rise to the full $13.8 billion, many times the $420 million paid-in capital. James Baker argues that taxpayer costs are small when debtors use World Bank loans to pay commercial bank interest. But when it is suggested that the same Bank lending be used to reduce the debt (e.g., by lending money to the debtors to repurchase their bank debt at a discount), Baker calls that a "taxpayer bailout." How convenient for the banks.

BAD POETRY

To the editors:

Surely Michael Blumenthal didn't take Dukakis's response to "a thousand points of light" ("I don't even know what that means") literally ("The Eloquence Gap," November 14). Since Dukakis is not unintelligent, and metaphor not an esoteric device beyond the grasp of, say . . . George Bush, Dukakis seemed to be saying that bad poetry, like bad politics, is worse than no poetry at all.

JALAINE HALSALL
Atlanta, Georgia

THE ZIONIST SOLUTION

To the editors:

The Jerusalem Diarist is correct in his analysis of the reason for the relative calm in Jerusalem as opposed to other parts of the country ("The Sealed Bottle," November 7). It is in no small measure the uncertainty over their future that has led the Palestinian Arabs of Judea, Samaria, and Gaza to riot this year. And it is the certainty of continued Israeli sovereignty over all of Jerusalem that has restrained the rock-throwers there. Where his argument breaks down is his refusal to see that ending the same uncertainty for the territories would be a major step toward ending the conflict.

Partition is lauded by many as the only possible solution. But it is a concept that has been tried in Palestine before (1922, 1947) and failed. The Diarist laments the "overreaching" of the Arabs and the bloody consequences of the *shabab* on the rampage. Yet he fails to realize that the essential character of the dispute over this land is one that is not conducive to compromises. The goal of the Palestinian Arabs is to do more than merely establish the "psychological frontier" of the green line. The creation of a *judenrein* entity across that frontier may be their idea of justice. But the abrogation of Jewish rights to the heart of the Jewish homeland would encourage the Arabs to demand more and put them in a position where they might achieve it. An Israel shorn of these lands would be in mortal peril.

The troubling events of the past ten months make it clear that there are only two options for the territories: the PLO or Israel. Only the establishment of Israeli sovereignty can lead to peace. The alternative is a PLO state and certain war. As difficult as it may be for the "Zionist conscience" of the Diarist to accept, it is the Zionist solution of settlement and certainty that is the surest path. The Arabs of the territories as well as those elsewhere must do as those of Jerusalem have done and come to terms with the immutability of the Jewish return to the Land of Israel.

JONATHAN S. TOBIN
Franklin Square, New York

IRON LADY'S CLAY FEET

To the editors:

John Lloyd's review of the ever-growin Thatcher literature ("Herstory," Novem ber 7) ignores the fragile political foun dation of the Iron Lady's revolution. I each of her three "victories" over split opposition, Mrs. Thatcher receive roughly the same proportion of the tot vote as Walter Mondale got in 1984. Li her friend Ronald Reagan, Maggie h been a very lucky politician—but s can't count on luck alone to propel l revolution into the 21st century.

WILLIAM M. BU
San Francisco, Califo

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THE NEW REPUBLIC
DECEMBER 12, 1988

SOUND-BITE DEMOCRACY

A prominent (and not dazzling v telegenic) Democrat recently complained about what tel vision has done to presidential elections. There is a "grov ing gap," he said, between what it takes to get elected—t e snappy sound bites, the gaudy symbolism, the telegenic ersona—and what it takes to govern. We wish it were so. I fact, though, television has corrupted the processes of lection and governance about equally; sound bites, goc l visuals, and telegenica are vital ingredients of leaders ip these days. For that reason, we are not among those ho think Michael Dukakis was unfairly punished by vote s for his miserable performance in the second presidential debate. His seeming inability to stir the souls of home vi wers is a perfectly valid (though not decisive, we feel) sou e of doubt about his ability to lead. So when, in the foll wing paragraphs, we blame electronic technology for Geo ge Bush's victory, we do so with careful qualification. Our complaint is about technology's corrosive effect not just or elections, but on democracy as a whole.

The corrosion is of a perverse sort. The way various information technologies, including tele ision, have damaged American democracy is by making i more democratic. The people's will is being translated into electoral discourse and public policy with record fficiency—more efficiency than the Founding Fathers int nded, and more efficiency than is good for us.

After the election, there was much pon erous discussion about what the "sound bite" has done to campaign debate. A good chunk of one "MacNeil/Lehrer Newshour" was spent wondering whether the dominanc of sound bites was the candidates' fault or the netw rks' fault. The correct answer is neither. The candidates were just giving the networks what they wanted, and th networks just wanted what the people wanted. Name y, melodrama: heavy-handed symbolism, junior-high hu nor, and lots of charges and countercharges. If that were 't what most TV viewers wanted, MacNeil and Lehrer would have been conducting this seminar before an audience of 40 million, and Dan Rather would be working as a weatherman at a UHF station in Texas. What you see every evening on the network news—a collage of good visuals, great quotes, and platitudinous analysis—is the people's will prevailing. And so it was during the campaign.

The other half of the feedback loop that has made campaigns overly democratic is polling technology. It was public and private surveys—including "focus groups"—that helped each candidate decide which irrelevances to highlight. Thus did George Bush's advisers discern what topics could give Dukakis "high negatives" and then gauge with excruciating precision the damage to be done with the image of Willie Horton. Eventually, the voters grew weary of negative campaigning, and polls showed them high-mindedly demanding to hear more about the issues. But even in obliging, the candidates remained slavish in their obedience to every primitive instinct and passing whim of the electorate. Hence Dukakis's least forgivable pander: his desperate protectionism, which fed on, and fed, xenophobia.

Granted: pandering, mud slinging, and schlocky symbolizing predate the electronic era. Candidates have long tried to give voters what they asked for, and the voters have often not asked for much in the way of responsible, substantive debate. But in the age of television, the voters seem to be more willing than before to settle for empty images, and in the age of polling, candidates exploit this willingness more adroitly than ever.

Unfortunately, the show doesn't end in November. Increasingly, being president consists of a continuous marketing of images, visual and verbal, over the airwaves, followed by the ready abandonment or revision of any offerings the public pans. The last few months have provided plenty of deeply symbolic comments on the state of American democracy, but few are more apt than the early speculation that Robert Teeter, Bush's pollster, would serve in the next administration as counselor to the president.

Among the problems with faithful devotion to opinion polls is that sometimes people need things they don't want, like tax hikes. We're not saying that voters should be stripped of control over their destiny; they deserve the chance every four years to reflect on the effects of tax policy and, if the economy is a mess, throw out the rascals who raised taxes. But the actual making of public policy is not a strong suit of the average American.

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This, remember, was the idea behind American democracy all along. A favorite pastime of crackpot pundits is to talk as if the Founding Fathers settled for representative democracy out of technological necessity—because it was impractical two centuries ago for the electorate to vote on legislation directly. John Naisbitt (remember *Megatrends*?) writes, "Direct citizen participation was simply not feasible, so we elected people to go off to the state capitals, represent us, vote, and then come back and tell us what happened." But now that computers, telephone lines, and TV keep us plugged into Washington, and Washington plugged into us, "We have outlived the historical usefulness of representative democracy, and we all sense intuitively that it is obsolete."

If Naisbitt, Alvin Toffler, and others of like mind had bothered to read, say, The Federalist Papers, they would know that representative democracy is much more than a relic of the pre-electronic age. Though the Founding Fathers did discuss the sheerly practical difficulties with large-scale direct democracy, they also noted its intrinsic disadvantages: policy shouldn't be hostage to the rapidly shifting winds of public opinion, nor to the mischiefs of faction. So, in representative government, the authors of the Constitution built a buffer between the voters (notably special interest groups) and policy formulation. In fact, so deep was the mistrust of popular judgment that the Electoral College was originally a living, breathing, deliberative body of intelligent, reflective men who autonomously elected a president. The people were supposed to keep their distance.

When we complain that information technology has stripped away the insulation surrounding policy formulation, we aren't just talking about the presidency, and we aren't just talking about television or public opinion polls. Look at the effect of computers on Congress. The ability of special interest groups to identify and mobilize constituents, to solicit contributions, and to manipulate Congress with rewards and punishment depends critically on mass mail and other computer capabilities. And the problem isn't just one of campaign contributions. Even if the National Rifle Association's computers weren't dishonestly sucking money from unwary gun owners and giving it to submissive congressmen, those computers would still be using mass-mailed lies to damage the candidacy of any legislators with the audacity to ignore a special interest group in pursuing the public good.

To be sure, interest groups have their virtues, and have long served as the core of a pluralistic democracy that works reasonably well. But if they function too effectively, democracy doesn't.

Further subjugating the typical member of Congress to special interest groups is the knowledge that C-SPAN records every move for posterity. While legislators can't use this footage of themselves in re-election campaigns, their opponents, or antagonistic interest groups, can. So telling unpleasant truths, challenging organized factions, and, more generally, speaking up for the public good aren't exactly growth industries in Congress.

The damage that television, polling, computers, and various other high-tech political tools have done to the electoral process and to governance itself is spelled out in a recent book, *The Electronic Commonwealth*, by Jeffrey B. Abramson, F. Christopher Arterton, and Gary R. Orren. It is a comprehensive book and a very sober one, not especially polemical, and certainly not alarmist. Yet its message is compelling: electronic technology is moving America away from representative democracy and toward "plebiscitary democracy"—which, the authors wisely observe, is not a healthy development.

NOTEBOOK

□ AFTER YOU, ALPHONSE: Having been elected on the promise to eliminate the federal deficit by 1993 through something called a "flexible freeze"—and having refused, throughout the campaign, to supply the recipe for this magic elixir—President-elect Bush is now terribly eager not to have to produce it. Richard Darman, Bush's designated OMB director, has the notion that instead of producing a budget of his own for the fiscal year beginning next October, President Bush should cooperate with Congress to come up with a compromise budget. Cooperation and compromise are fine things, but the Democratic Congress should certainly insist that Bush put his cards on the table first. Any budget must contain some combination of the following ingredients: (*a*) a tax increase; (*b*) entitlement cuts; (*c*) lies. There is no reason, after the way he achieved his office, for Democrats to let Bush off the hook for any of these. Bush would like nothing better than to escape the trap he's built for himself by being able to say that a tax increase was forced on him by the opposition-controlled legislature. The Democratic leadership can't possibly be dumb enough to fall into this trap. Can they?

□ FEDERALISM AND NUCLEAR POWER: We sympathize with the frustration that led the Reagan administration to change the rules regarding nuclear power plants. A presidential order—conveniently postponed until after the election—authorizes the Federal Emergency Management Agency to override local agencies that dither too long in designing emergency evacuation plans for new nuclear plants. In two of the longest and bloodiest epic battles over nuclear plants—involving the Seabrook plant in New Hampshire and the Shoreham plant on Long Island—finished facilities sit idle because local officials (of neighboring Massachusetts, in the case of Seabrook) refuse to designate an emergency plan. We think nuclear power ought to be part of a sensible energy policy for the United States. We also think, of course, that if the citizenry think otherwise, albeit irrationally, nuclear power shouldn't be rammed down their throats. However, the political process by which nuclear power has been stopped is less an illustration of democracy at work than of our system's general bias in favor of paralysis. Opponents of nuclear

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power haven't won the democratic competition; they've used every procedural device known to lawyers in order to prevent an orderly democratic decision. Allowing a completed multibillion-dollar energy generator to rot for lack of an evacuation plan is a particularly vivid example. All that said, though, there's one more irony to savor: the Reagan administration's cavalier attitude toward states' rights—its untroubled willingness to use federal power to override local decision-making—when one of its own hobbyhorses is at stake. This demonstrates once again, as so often in the Reagan years, the maxim that there are no federalists in the ideological foxholes.

The mud pies are flying.

THE DARTMOUTH WARS

IN SPITE OF what you may have seen on television or read on the *Wall Street Journal* editorial page or in one of William F. Buckley's columns, Dartmouth College is not a left-wing loony bin where conservative thought is systematically suppressed. Nor is Dartmouth the racist-sexist-"fascist" institution that many liberals imagine, based on its stereotype as a hard-drinking bastion of maleness, its difficult transition to coeducation, and the fact that most publicity about the college focuses on the rabidly right-wing off-campus newspaper, the *Dartmouth Review*.

In fact, it's a first-rate university, small enough that undergraduates are routinely taught by full professors. And it is destined to get even better under a new president, James O. Freedman, who has set about attracting more of the very smartest scholars in America to the faculty and student body, and also more women, blacks, and other minorities, as well as making the atmosphere of the Hanover, New Hampshire, college more systematically intellectual.

Dartmouth *is* in the throes of an intense ideological conflict that, when it gets out of hand, makes the college seem like an upper New England version of the Weimar Republic, as overwrought partisans hurl charges of "Hitler!" and "Anti-Semite!" at one another, and occasionally engage in disorderly conduct. Fundamentally, however, the conflict is invigorating and educational—an ongoing, concrete opportunity for students to judge right from wrong at close hand, a reason that bright students ought to want to go to Dartmouth, not stay away. (I confess prejudice: I'm an alumnus and I wish the place well.)

The stimulus of conflict is the *Dartmouth Review*, an eight-year-old student-run weekly backed financially and (if it can be called that) morally by the Old Right, including Buckley, the Olin Foundation, and the Coors brewing family. The newspaper often is witty, insouciant, provocative, sophomoric—a useful, cheeky check on left-wing excess, when it does not itself descend into sick right-wing excess. All too often, it does.

To its credit, the *Review* in 1986 exposed official distribution of a safe-sex kit whose written material made no value judgments whatever about some of the kinkiest sex practices imaginable (labeling them, at worst, "dangerous," whereas they were also disgusting). Last year it enterprisingly conducted a "cultural literacy" quiz, finding much of even Dartmouth's high-achieving student body deficient. The paper promotes Allan Bloomism—the study of Great Books and Western Civilization—and disparages ethnic studies, women's studies, and other educational novelties. On the other hand, it also habitually defends fraternities, drunkenness, and "Animal House" anti-intellectualism, and ridicules Freedman's attempts to persuade elite academic achievers to choose Dartmouth over Harvard, Yale, and Stanford.

Last month the *Review* let loose on the college for inviting Communist Angela Davis to speak (for a reported fee of $10,000) at an observance of Dartmouth's 15th year of coeducation, and on three deans who participated in a standing ovation for Davis. The *Review* regularly attacks radical feminists, some of whom threw red-dyed tampons around the campus in a protest against sexism; the Afro-American Society for allegedly practicing separatism; and Native Americans for successfully (and rightly) persuading the college to do away with the Indian as a Dartmouth mascot and symbol. It also attacks professors and organizations that support the Sandinistas, the PLO, and other Third World liberation movements.

The *Review*, though, hardly limits itself to investigative journalism, argumentation, or even polemics. Ad hominem attacks—even vicious sexual and ethnic slurs—are mainstays of its method. In a course guide last year, it said this about a feminist English professor: "This quim queen just can't separate English from her neurotic obsession with the human crotch." ("Quim" means "cunt" in archaic English.) Of a history professor, it wrote, "Little Latin commies have found their patron saint of academia." It said of black music professor William Cole, a perennial target, "He's very skinny, a little nutty, and very unstable, all of which could be seen as signs of some sort of drug addiction."

The *Review*'s most notorious single article, until recently, was "Dis 'Sho Ain't No Jive, Bro," written in 1982 by Keeney Jones (later a speechwriter for Education Secretary William Bennett), which used ghetto argot to demean black students admitted under affirmative action. After this piece ran, conservative Representative Jack Kemp withdrew as a member of the *Review*'s advisory board. In 1986 *Review* students instigated the nighttime destruction of three shanties erected without permission by students protesting apartheid. The *Review* snottily called its action "campus beautification," whereas it really was hooliganism.

Now the *Review* is the focus of a new uproar, brought on by its likening Freedman to Hitler in an October 19 article titled "Ein Reich, Ein Volk, Ein Freedmann" and in an October 26 front-page cartoon depicting him with a Hitlerian mustache. The article, an infantile and repulsive attempt at satire, accused Freedman of plotting a "Final Solution of the Conservative Problem" at Dartmouth.

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The Anti-Defamation League of B'nai B'rith appropriately declared that the *Review* had served to "trivialize the Holocaust and the memory of those people brutally murdered by the Nazis."

Less appropriately and a little hysterically, 11 faculty members wrote to the *Review*'s advisory board (which includes Patrick Buchanan, media critic Edwin Diamond, author George Gilder, and conservative philosopher Russell Kirk) asserting that because Freedman is Jewish, the *Review* was practicing "anti-Semitism." The argument ran that "this is a vile example of the same sort of Jew-baiting that accompanied the rise of fascism in Europe only a generation ago," and said the article "could have been modeled on the Nazi publication *Der Stürmer*, in which satire and humor were used to dehumanize Jews and other minorities." One faculty member said that *Review* editors were "pre-fascist thugs." That's excessive. "Pre-fascist brats" would be appropriate, though.

The *Review*'s editor, Harmeet Dhillon, acknowledged that the original piece had been "admittedly excessive" and "hyperbolic" and allowed as how she could understand that "members of the Jewish faith might be offended." But she said that "this entire episode has served to point out the frightening accuracy of the *Review*'s warnings . . . about President Freedman and his cohorts" who, she said, "seek to bludgeon [the *Review*] to death" and "eradicate" its staff. That's also the burden of charges by Buckley and others: that the Dartmouth administration is trying to put the *Review* out of business, or punish its editors for what they've written.

THAT'S NONSENSE. The *Dartmouth Review* is in business. It has not been censored, closed down, or even sued. Disciplinary action was taken against *Review* editors last spring—two were suspended from school for 18 months, one for six months—but for what they did, not what they wrote. They wrote a devastating exposé of Professor Cole based on a tape recording of a classroom session in which he semi-coherently rambled along about poverty and the black experience, nuclear waste and the problem of evil, not music. A separate article recounted Cole's screaming at *Review* staff members, "You're all goddamn fuckin' ass white boy racists," when they placed two phone calls to his home asking for comment.

What the students were punished for, however, was entering Cole's lecture hall the day following publication, ostensibly to deliver a letter advising him of his right to reply, but pretty clearly hoping to provoke the high-strung professor into a physical attack. The *Review*'s then-editor, Christopher Baldwin, later told the *Dartmouth Alumni Magazine* that he took off his glasses before entering the classroom. "We know Cole is a violent man," he said. "I took along a photographer because I suspected that Cole would be violent."

The *Review* staff members interrupted Cole's conversation with students after class, ignored his repeated demands that they leave, repeatedly took his picture at close range with a flash camera, surreptitiously tried to tape-record the goings-on, and pressed in close to him. The *Review* got its small melee, as Cole shouted more obscenities and knocked the *Review*'s camera to the ground, wrecking the flash. The *Review* editors were suspended for disorderly conduct and invasion of privacy after a two-day hearing before a campus judicial body composed of students, faculty, and deans.

Cole was cleared of any wrongdoing and was generally praised by the faculty and administration, although independent observers consider him an embarrassment to the college. He won tenure in 1979 on the basis of biographies of John Coltrane and Miles Davis and on the basis of his ability to attract jazz greats to teach on the campus, but he has done little research or writing since, and his course is generally considered a "gut." (Much the same thing is said about a *Review* favorite, English professor and conservative columnist Jeffrey Hart.)

The Cole incident unleashed furious First Amendment attacks against Dartmouth from such conservative worthies as former Treasury Secretary William Simon and New Hampshire Senator Gordon Humphrey. With help from high-priced lawyers and publicists paid by conservative alumni and rightists around the country, the *Review*'s suspended editors have sued the college, charging censorship and racial discrimination (the argument being that they would not have been punished had they been black), and have attempted to make their cause a civil liberties cause célèbre.

Part of the argument is that the valiant little *Review* is being set upon by the giant college administration, with Freedman in the lead. In fact, what's happened is that Freedman has attempted to restore civility to the campus by administering a series of much-needed scoldings—no more—to the out-of-control brats of the *Review*. In a speech to the faculty last March, for example, Freedman accused the *Review* of "poisoning the intellectual environment of our campus." He charged that the *Review* "vulgarizes responsible conservative thought" and "maliciously engages in bullying tactics" designed to keep women and blacks away from the faculty and student body. "What the *Review* has done on this campus has not been decent. What it has done has been irresponsible, mean-spirited, and ugly."

HE'S RIGHT. In the 1960s and 1970s, adult faculty members and administrators stood by while left-wing students took over and terrorized campuses. It happens still, when radicals forbid conservatives to speak, and administrations that tolerate such behavior deserve criticism. At Dartmouth, grown-ups are standing up to right-wing radicals, and they deserve credit. If the conservative movement wants tough, effective ideological debate at Dartmouth and on other campuses—and they should—it's time for Bill Buckley, Patrick Buchanan, and the editors of the *Wall Street Journal* to conduct off-campus classes to teach their disciples the difference between good journalism and character assassination.

MORTON M. KONDRACKE

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WHITE HOUSE WATCH

WHAT'S SUNUNU?

SHORTLY AFTER the 1984 election, John Sununu told one of his conservative pals in Washington some startling news. "I'm going for George Bush in 1988," he disclosed. Bush wasn't the favored candidate of the Republican Party's right wing at the time. Sununu's crony said it would be outrageous to back Bush. Well, said Sununu, I like Bush and he is probably to going to win the whole thing, the Republican nomination and the presidency. And if that's the case, I'm going to play a role in the Bush administration. With this in mind, Sununu announced last spring that he wouldn't run for another term as governor of New Hampshire. He knew that if he ran he couldn't handle the first question the press would ask: Will you promise not to quit and join a Bush administration?

Sununu's ambition exceeded what the Bush crowd figured was appropriate for him. Bush's advisers saw Sununu as secretary of a second-tier Cabinet department, education or energy. Sununu never considered this. "No way," he told an associate the day he decided against running for governor again. His first choice was vice president. "He had high hopes," the associate said. Next to that, he liked secretary of defense. But conservative allies fretted that Sununu might have trouble winning confirmation. They urged him to go for the White House chief of staff's job, which doesn't require Senate approval. He did. To the surprise of both Sununu's friends and Bush's inner circle of advisers, he got it.

Sununu had to leap two hurdles in his path to the White House. The first was of his own making. In 1987 Sununu refused to issue a state proclamation condemning the United Nations General Assembly's position that Zionism is racism. The anti-Israel resolution was sponsored by the Soviet Union. Every other governor in the country, along with the U.S. House and Senate and President Reagan, issued a condemnation. Not surprisingly, Sununu's refusal alarmed Jews and other supporters of Israel. They found his explanations disingenuous and contradictory. Sununu initially said governors have no business fiddling in foreign affairs. He said he has a firm policy against proclamations in that area. When confronted with ones he'd signed on Bastille Day and Captive Nations Week, he offered another explanation. Issuing the proclamation might jeopardize his ability to work for peace in the Middle East. In other words, governors should stay out of foreign affairs in their official proclamations, but not in their actions.

As governor of New Hampshire since 1982, Sununu is mostly identified as a champion of low taxes and nuclear power. But he is also an Arab American (his father was Lebanese) and an active member of the National Association of Arab Americans. "There's an opportunity here for me to use the fact that I'm one of the highest elected Arab Americans in the country as a voice for negotiations, conference, and discussions as a tool in achieving peace in the Middle East rather than some of the tragic things that are happening over there right now," he told the *Manchester Union Leader* in 1987. "I'm not going to do anything—proclamation or whatever it is—that doesn't allow me to retain credibility in that process." At the time of the flap, Sununu neither criticized the U.N. resolution privately nor explained how condemning it officially would jeopardize his peace efforts.

In speeches, Sununu has never openly attacked Israel, but two other things suggested he is hardly a sympathizer. At an NAAA meeting in 1984, he urged Arab Americans to get involved in politics "to make sure we can influence the process to build an evenhanded policy [in the Middle East] that promotes peace and justice." This isn't as neutral as it sounds. "Evenhanded" is a code word, meaning "don't back Israel so much." Then last June, Sununu issued a proclamation memorializing the 1967 Israeli attack on the spy ship USS *Liberty* in which 34 American sailors were killed. It called the attack, which Israel said was a mistake, "vicious and unprovoked." Governor Mario Cuomo of New York and three other governors signed similar proclamations.

All this made qualms about Sununu on the Israel question a real problem. He began working on the problem weeks before the Republican convention last August. Sununu was Bush's personal representative on platform negotiations. The Bush campaign's advisory committee on the Middle East had worked up a set of strikingly pro-Israel recommendations, including strong condemnation of the U.N. resolution and a suggestion that American funds might be withheld from the U.N. unless the resolution is rescinded. The committee chairman, Gordon Zacks of Columbus, Ohio, said Sununu was "absolutely terrific" in their talks. "He enthusiastically accepted and endorsed the recommendations of our group without modification." Zacks asked Sununu how he could reconcile this with his refusal to issue the state proclamation a year earlier. He told Zacks that "it's a mistake" for governors to intrude in foreign policy, but party platforms obviously should. Zacks quoted Sununu as saying, "As a private citizen, I do not believe Zionism is racism and I do believe the U.N. resolution should be repealed." What resulted from his dealings with Sununu, Zacks said, was "the most pro-Israel platform of either party ever. This couldn't have happened without John Sununu's support."

Still, Sununu's appointment as chief of staff would have been highly controversial if Sununu hadn't spoken out. At a press conference on November 17 at which Bush announced his selection of Sununu, the president-elect said he expected no Jewish backlash at all. He was safe in saying this because he knew what Sununu was going to say moments later. The second question to Sununu was about the U.N. resolution. "I'm very sensitive to that issue," he said. While it was "inappropriate" for him as governor to deal with the resolution, "I have no problem saying that that ought to be repudiated, that we ought to take actions at the U.N. to take that off the rolls." Without being asked, Sununu added something. "I understand very clearly that the key to peace and tranquillity in the Middle East is to guar-

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antee, and continue to guarantee, the integrity and security of Israel. I have no problem stating that unequivocally."

The other hurdle in Sununu's path to the chief of staff's job was James Baker, Bush's closest friend, campaign chairman, and secretary of state-designate. Bush was easy. Sununu was urged, by conservative leader Paul Weyrich among others, to tell Bush flatly that he wanted the White House post. Sununu did, and on Election Day Bush informed his staff that Sununu was under strong consideration. Though Baker gets along with Sununu, he wanted Craig Fuller, a longtime ally and chief of Bush's vice presidential staff, in the job. Seeing he couldn't stop Sununu entirely, Baker came up with the idea of a White House troika—Fuller, Sununu, and Robert Teeter, who'd been Bush's pollster and campaign strategist.

Bush was intrigued by the idea, but neither Fuller nor Sununu was. Six days after the election, Sununu met privately with Bush in Florida. He told the president-elect he didn't want the job without full authority. Bush agreed and said Sununu's appointment would be announced in a week. When Sununu told his associates, they were uneasy, fearing Baker would have time to undo the appointment. They unleashed a barrage of phone calls to Bush, his sons, and campaign aides such as Lee Atwater to get it announced earlier. Three days after the Florida meeting, Sununu was named.

ALL OF WHICH leads to the question of what kind of chief of staff he'll be. Sununu, 49, is certainly smart enough. Stories in the New Hampshire press have listed his IQ as 170 and his SAT scores as 800 in math, 780 in verbal. With the help of his chief campaign adviser, J. Brian Smith, Sununu has risen from being an obscure engineering professor at Tufts with eight kids and little money, to losing narrowly the GOP Senate nomination in 1980, to winning the governorship in 1982, and now going to the White House. He can be abrasive and short-tempered. In his own defense, Sununu once told a reporter, "I'm not always as obnoxious as I sometimes seem."

He also can be wonderfully candid. In 1984 he and his Democratic opponent for governor, Chris Spirou, the Speaker of the New Hampshire House of Representatives at the time, met at a joint appearance. The event was forgettable. But afterward, as the reporters and camera crews were leaving, Sununu motioned Spirou over and whispered something in his ear. According to Spirou, he said, "Chris, you're a real asshole." Sununu left, but Spirou immediately called back reporters, revealed the whispered words, and demanded that Sununu apologize. Sununu, pursued by the press, called Smith, his political guru. Smith asked if Spirou was telling the truth. I'd never use a word like "asshole," Sununu said. Smith guffawed. Now I know it's true, he said, because you've called me that frequently. In public at any rate, Sununu never acknowledged saying that word to Spirou. He won re-election anyway. Can Sununu get away with this kind of bluntness in Washington? There's only one way to find out.

FRED BARNES

Wall Street solves the deficit.

AN LBO OF THE USA

A UNIQUE OPPORTUNITY may be at hand for public policy-makers wrestling with America's overwhelming and apparently chronic budget and trade deficits. Financial engineering and leveraged buyouts are radically reshaping corporate America, honing managers' competitive drives and creating wonderfully exotic loan opportunities for banks and pension funds. Little of this creativity, however, is spilling over to the public sector. Granted that Chile has swapped a few of its bonds for copper mines and Costa Rica has retired debt at a discount to fund rain forest preservation. But the truly choice sovereign properties—i.e., the Western industrialized countries and Japan—have not been put into play. One could argue that the current intellectual climate and financial markets make a leveraged buyout of the United States a particularly attractive instrument for the American people.

Skeptics may scoff that this suggestion amounts to mortgaging our children's future and even is a bit unpatriotic. Potential investors may say that, if countries start to come on the market, they would rather own Japan, West Germany, or even Taiwan. Unfortunately, these countries have all the money and thus would be more logical buyers than sellers; furthermore, unfriendly takeovers of allies would be difficult to sell politically. By contrast a friendly leveraged buyout of the United States itself could be a politician's dream. The proceeds of such a buyout, if structured properly, would enable Americans to pay off the national debt, permanently fund Social Security, and still enjoy a significant—if somewhat smaller—country. Meanwhile a smaller, more focused America, after shedding unproductive assets, would be a more formidable competitor in the world market.

A possible deal might go as follows. First, Congress and the president would empower the Department of the Treasury to explore alternatives to maximize the American people's investment in their country. Next, Treasury officials, using their excellent Wall Street connections, would contact selected investment bankers and lawyers and invite them to meet for round-the-clock strategy sessions at the Pierre Hotel over a holiday weekend. A strategy would quickly emerge for a syndicate to buy the entire country from our government, generate maximum cash by selling off inessential states, and then flip the core business back to the original American government on a tax-free basis. A private tax ruling from the IRS would be advisable as our initial investment, especially in the original 13 colonies, is quite low.

America's core business would be defined geographically as all the country east of the Mississippi and selected national parks. In order to minimize disruption of major league sports and also to keep the Arch, we might include St. Louis and Minneapolis in the new country. These new boundaries would allow the government to offer for sale

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all federal lands and the rights of sovereignty over the Western two-thirds of our country. Basically, we would be back to the United States on the eve of the Louisiana Purchase, although we would also own Florida free and clear. All private property in the states now on the block would still belong to current owners, and those citizens could either stay put or sell their property and move east.

The actual underwriting group would consist of that familiar chorus on reconstructing dramas—investment bankers, money center banks, and most of the savings and loan industry (to buy the junk bonds). Since we would be retrieving the Eastern United States immediately, a nominal price could be placed on those properties, although a strong contract should be drawn so that wily underwriters do indeed return our future country. I think an asking price of $7.5 trillion would be reasonable for the parts of the country earmarked for sale. This is one-and-a-half times the United States 1988 GNP, a very attractive multiple for such a museum piece property.

Would the shareholders, the American electorate, go for such a package? Let us assume the first two-and-a-half trillion dollars or so would go to pay off all present outstanding federal debt. By eliminating about $150 billion a year in interest payments, this would just about balance the federal budget. The retirement of the national debt would also allow the Federal Reserve to set domestic interest rates without having to worry about whether the Japanese or West Germans will buy our Treasury bonds. (With no debt and a balanced budget, we wouldn't be issuing any.) Nor would the Fed need to be concerned about what lower interest rates would do to the level of the dollar.

The remaining $5 trillion could go as individual $20,000 payments to each man, woman, and child in the country. These funds would go into separate IRA accounts for each of America's 250 million citizens. The average citizen, 31 years old, would have an account worth about $600,000 by the time of retirement in the year 2023. Thus the two most pressing fiscal issues facing America, our chronic budget deficits and the lack of a solvent Social Security system for anyone under the age of 40, would be cured.

The conceptual soundness of this proposal is, in my opinion, unarguable. But legitimate questions might be raised about whether the market can absorb a $7.5 trillion deal—nearly 400 times larger than the current leveraged buyout of RJR Nabisco. I believe, however, that potential investors will correctly see this as a unique, once-in-a-lifetime opportunity.

The government currently controls approximately 700 million acres of land, almost all of which is in the territory earmarked for sale. Initially, one might expect buyer resistance at $10,000 an acre, especially with large expanses of tundra and salt flats. However, buyers would be acquiring significant infrastructure (e.g., Hoover Dam and the Golden Gate Bridge), significant natural resources (e.g., the Naval Petroleum Reserve in the Beaufort Sea), and, for some buyers, the appealing chance to put the Pacific Ocean between them and the rest of Asia. The Japanese would be the obvious buyers of federal lands in California and Hawaii, while the Taiwanese might wish to relocate to the Pacific Northwest.

The Russians, still rankling over Czar Alexander's giveaway of Alaska, might be the sentimental favorites to reclaim the former frontier state, but they have no foreign reserves and we would have to discourage owner financing. There also might be resistance from domestic environmentalists; although the Soviets have seemingly turned over a new leaf with their recent freeing of Putu and Siku, the two ice-bound gray whales off Point Barrow, all American sea otters would be advised to head south and east. It is quite possible that the West German banks, not equity players themselves, would be delighted to finance the Russians on such a purchase, although probably on a secured basis.

Cash buyers, such as the Marcoses and the Sultan of Brunei, could be offered the Channel Islands off Santa Barbara or a number of attractive coral atolls in Micronesia.

Would the United States be an attractive place for our newly wealthy and financially secure people to live? Even if all 90 million or so Americans living west of the Mississippi decided to move, our new homeland still would be less crowded than France, a delightful country. Real estate values would soar in the West as land-starved Japanese, used to Tokyo prices, snapped up private homes. Housing starts would boom in the East, fueled by transferees rushing to get choice building sites in such depressed areas as West Virginia and Mississippi.

Probably the point that would clinch the deal would be the financial returns reaped by the American people and their underwriters. The United States acquired almost all our country before 1867 for a total price of around $85 million. Our country has gotten excellent returns from this investment, has given land to homesteaders and railroads, and still has a chance to get 100,000 times its money back with a perfectly presentable country left over. Even the rather modest nine percent compounded return on principal this represents over the past 140 or so years would significantly beat the Bond Buyers Index and domestic inflation during that period.

The Street would love the deal. A mere one percent of the total package would net investment bankers and lawyers $70 billion, helping them to meet their budgets well into fiscal year 1990.

Some economists and journalists have said that these current huge financial deals create no economic value; the market is being driven by the unbridled greed of management and their advisers coupled with a laissez-faire attitude in government. Rather than being so negative, wouldn't we be better off to help our industrious but crowded neighbors use their strong currencies to invest in America while we, at the same time, put our own financial house in order? As a pragmatic mercantilistic people, we have a rare opportunity to regain our economic momentum. Let us not let such a historic moment slip away.

DAVID KEMPER

David Kemper is president of Commerce Bankshares. He lives in St. Louis.

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Quick, a Mideast peace conference.

BEFORE THE STORM

POSTELECTION ISRAEL has all the makings of a disaster. The worst-case scenario goes like this: With the formation of a Likud-led coalition comprising the extreme nationalist factions and the religious parties, the peace process grinds to a complete halt. Driven by Palestinian despair, harsher Israeli repression, and expanded settlement activity, the violence of the *intifada* intensifies.

The Egyptian-Israeli peace, masterstroke of American diplomacy and foundation of America's strategic preeminence in the Middle East, unravels. Egypt is impelled by its own citizens and the rest of the Arab world to sever its ties with Israel, which then feels honor-bound to retaliate. The governments of Jordan, Saudi Arabia, and other Arab nations friendly to the United States threaten to withdraw their cooperation unless the United States promises to come down hard on Israel.

In Israel itself, ministries put under the control of the religious parties attempt to enforce stricter observance of blue laws and regulations, shattering the precarious status quo in synagogue-state relations and causing more frequent and violent clashes between the militant religious minority and the secularist majority. At the same time, the escalating cycle of violence and repression in the West Bank and Gaza undermines the nation's defense establishment. More and more soldiers refuse to serve in the occupied territories or to put down protests, discipline is impaired, solidarity within units breaks down, and morale plummets. Throughout all this, the media whip up a worldwide frenzy of condemnation of Israel, while American Jewry, Israel's traditional shield, is paralyzed by internal division and alienated by the growing power of orthodox groups in the governing coalition. The strife and troubles invite adventurism on the part of Israel's enemies, and tempt Israel's government to divert the unrest outwardly by taking precipitate pre-emptive military action.

Crises have been the midwife of progress toward peace in the region in the past. Yet for the potentially disastrous results of the Israeli election to be turned into an opportunity for furthering the peace process will require great understanding, skill, and determination on the part of American policy-makers. Specifically, the United States should gear its own policy and use all the resources at its disposal to promote a *properly conceived* international conference. In saying this I wish to dissociate myself emphatically from those who advocate pressure on Israel as a panacea under any and all circumstances, and even more from those who rationalize such advocacy in terms of saving Israel from itself. I base my argument on three general premises about American interests in the Middle East, and an assessment, in that context, of the situation that has arisen after the Israeli elections.

The first general premise is that the United States has some basic interests in Israel and some key Arab countries. The second is that, in the absence of peace, crises are bound to arise in which these two sets of interests pull the United States in opposite directions to the potential detriment of both sets. The third premise is that while some of those crises may leave the United States with no choice but to try to temporize, muddle through, and seek to control the damage, others may generate sufficient tensions to bend previously fixed positions, promote peace, and enable a reconciliation of American interests on both sides of the Arab-Israeli divide.

My assessment is that the situation after the Israeli elections has the latter kind of potential, and that a push by the United States for a properly conceived international conference is the best way to realize that potential.

SUCH A CONFERENCE must have the participation of all parties to the conflict, including Israel, Jordan, and the PLO or a Palestinian representation approved by it, Syria, Egypt, as well as the Soviet Union, the United States, and the remaining permanent members of the U.N. Security Council—Britain, France, and China. In order to overcome the inevitable apprehensions of these participants while sustaining their hopes that their essential interests may be satisfied, three interrelated conditions must be met:

First, the conference should have no authority to impose a settlement; but, on the other hand, only a settlement approved by the entire conference would be deemed to have its sanction. The former proviso is designed to assuage Israel's fear of an imposed solution and the United States' own concern about Soviet attempts to outbid it for Arab favor. The latter proviso is meant to meet Soviet and Syrian apprehensions that the conference may merely serve as a cover for a separate Israeli-Jordanian/Palestinian settlement.

The second condition is that participation in the conference should be subject to: (*a*) acceptance of Resolution 242, and recognition of the "legitimate rights of the Palestinians," without any elaboration of the specific meaning of either; and (*b*) a commitment by all parties that, within that loose framework, all issues would be open to negotiations. The United States, for instance, may continue to advance the position that Resolution 242 calls for Israeli withdrawal from each of the segments of territories occupied in the 1967 war (Sinai, the West Bank and Gaza, and the Golan), while Shamir may continue to hold that the call for withdrawal was addressed to the territories as a whole and that Israel has already complied with that provision by withdrawing from Sinai. The different positions would be subject to the envisaged negotiations. Similarly, the Palestinian representatives may insist that the "legitimate rights" of their people mean the creation of a Palestinian state alongside Israel, while the Israeli representatives may insist on the meaning that former Prime Minister Begin gave to the term "full autonomy" when he subscribed to it in the

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Camp David agreements. The different positions would be subject to negotiations.

The third condition, implicit in the other two, is that the conference should be organized not as a one-time event designed to provide a quick resolution of the conflict, but as a forum for sustained, formal and informal, bilateral and multilateral negotiations, with the parties themselves voluntarily devising or agreeing to particular formats that suit them, case by case and issue by issue.

This kind of conference would also fit in with the Soviets' "new thinking" about the Middle East—which calls for a settlement that more or less codifies the existing "correlation of influence" in the region between the two superpowers—and would thereby make Soviet support, indeed co-sponsorship, likely. Soviet support would in turn limit Syria's range of options—by discouraging, for instance, its quest for strategic parity with Israel and making any but a purely defensive war option extremely risky. Damascus would soon realize that Syria's participation in this kind of conference represents its most rational choice.

Soviet support for the conference could have a similar effect on the PLO; but it is more likely that internal divisions within the PLO would require the bringing of additional pressures to bear. The proceedings of the Algiers meeting of the Palestinian National Council (PNC) provide a good illustration. Faced with the pressure of the *intifada*, King Hussein's exit, the prospect of a tough Likud government, and Soviet prodding, the PLO finally delivered itself of a statement accepting Resolution 242 as a basis for an international conference, after having rejected that resolution for 20 years. The PLO, however, hedged that decision with many ambiguous resolutions, and coupled it with the condition that Palestinian self-determination—a code word for a Palestinian state—be accepted by other participants in the conference in advance of any negotiations. Inducing the PLO to drop that condition and accept the principle of unfettered negotiations may require letting the PLO suffer further the consequences of its present stance until its last reticent factions are compelled to relent.

THE SAME approach is apt to overcome the initial opposition of a Likud-led government, though in that case the circumstantial and deliberate pressure needed to cause it to turn around would be far less than in the case of the PLO. For one thing, the majority of Israelis have time and time again expressed themselves in favor of an international conference. The elections themselves have given a considerable majority to parties that not only support a conference but favor, in principle, a territorial compromise. Against the 52 Knesset mandates gained by opponents of a conference and compromise (Likud, three right-wing factions, and the National Religious Party), supporters (Labor, three allied factions, three Arab lists, and three of the four religious parties—Shas, Agudah, and Degel Hatorah) have gained 68 mandates. Although the three politically moderate religious parties would defer to the Likud on the territorial and conference questions in exchange for Likud concessions on religious matters, they would remain susceptible to defection.

The Likud itself is apt to prove amenable to a firm American push for a conference if it is not called upon to concede to views antithetical to its aspirations. This, after all, is what Prime Minister Begin, the founder of the Likud and its spiritual father, did under similar circumstances in 1977. When pressed by Jimmy Carter to go to a Geneva peace conference and accept the American interpretation of 242, he resisted; but when he was reassured that the meaning of 242 was open to negotiations, he agreed to participate and, if I am not mistaken, coined the phrase "everything is open to negotiations." Begin demonstrated the same flexibility when he subscribed to various formulations regarding the Palestinian question—including recognition of the "legitimate rights of the Palestinians"—in order to avert a crisis with the United States and make possible the Camp David Accords.

Likud's right-wing partners may resist a conference, defecting from the coalition and bringing down the government. In that case, however, it should not be too hard to form a Likud-Labor coalition on the basis of a specific program to attend the conference and, if an agreement should come within reach, to submit the issue to a referendum. An incidental benefit from such a development would be a weakening of the leverage of the religious parties and, perhaps, an opportunity to effect electoral reform under joint Likud-Labor sponsorship. (There is a remote chance of this happening even now, if the Likud should find it impossible to accommodate all the demands of the religious parties.)

SHOULD THE American endeavor to initiate an international conference succeed, two corollaries would necessarily follow: suspension of new settlement activities, and termination of all acts of resistance and terror. Once more Shamir could invoke the precedent set by Begin when he agreed to suspend settlement activity during the Egyptian-Israeli peace negotiations; he could cite the cessation of resistance and terror as further justification of his action. Should the PLO and/or the local Palestinians refuse to desist under those circumstances, they would forfeit any claim for Arab and world sympathy, and Shamir could take far-reaching repressive measures with minimal domestic, regional, and international risk.

An international conference would thus halt the feared deterioration of the situation and get the peace process back off the ground. Idealists and dreamers may scoff at a proposal that guarantees no solution, much less a quick one. Realists know that neglecting the possible for the ideal has only ensured that the worst should have a free hand.

NADAV SAFRAN

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Why America is ready for George Bush.

PRESIDENCY BY RALPH LAUREN

BY ALESSANDRA STANLEY

THE EXTERIOR SHOT: A tiny blond girl in a pastel-blue dress totters in slow motion across a gleaming freshly-mown lawn. As Vangelis-like (*Chariots of Fire*) music swells, a tall, fine-boned man wearing a blue striped shirt turns, opens his arms, and sweeps the child high in the air.

The interior: in a large, old-fashioned country kitchen, the same man tosses ingredients into a simmering lobster pot, surrounded by helpful, happy grandchildren, attractively arrayed in faded all-natural fibers.

Picnic exterior: sun-dappled adults and children loll on the grass, circling the gentleman, who sits cross-legged on the ground. A small granddaughter hugs his back, and her tiny arms reach around his neck like the sleeves of a carelessly tossed tennis sweater. The smiling patriarch talks animatedly and eats, but he chews with his mouth closed.

Tradition. Family. Manners. Freeze any frame, and you have an instant Ralph Lauren advertisement, one of those lush tableaus of well-bred families at play that spread across many pages of glossy magazines, moodily evoking class and quality and grace, without ad copy or price tags. Actually, the picnic commercial was filmed at Kennebunkport, Maine, the male model is George Bush, and the improbably well-behaved children and grandchildren are all unpaid members of the Bush extended family.

The credit line in the commercial goes to Roger Ailes, Bush's media adviser, but an acknowledgment is due to fashion designer Ralph Lauren. Without Ralph Lauren and his expert molding of American taste, George Bush, Andover '42, Yale '48, a.k.a. "Poppy," might never have been elected. For more than a decade, Lauren has been hooking middle-class and lower-middle-class Americans on WASP aesthetics and pseudo-English gentility; the country has gone from Ralph Lauren clothes, to Ralph Lauren home furnishings, to Ralph Laurenesque architecture, design, and art. Get ready for the Ralph Lauren presidency.

Ronald Reagan also deserves some credit since he blurred for good the line between commercial advertising and political philosophy. Reagan's Norman Rockwellesque 1984 "Morning Again in America" commercials were virtually indistinguishable from television ads hawking Pepsi, cars, or insurance; the message in both was bring back the good old days of Main Street, white picket fences, and newspaper boys on bikes. No matter that nobody did bring them back; in 1988 Bush's early ads borrowed heavily from Reagan and played on the same themes. That's because Bush aides thought they had to sell a product nobody but his mother would buy, George Bush, Uber-prep. They were wrong. Fortunately for them, they discovered their error in time.

The ads started to change. The brief, blurry glimpses of Bush family life at the summer retreat along the rocky coast of Maine are tantalizing—and dreamily familiar. White wicker chairs on the porch, a pedigree cocker spaniel, little girls in Liberty print dresses, vast lawns, patchwork quilts, leather-bound books. Casual, yet understatedly elegant: the "whole atmosphere of the good life" that Ralph Lauren says he conjures in his ads, and that millions of Americans have learned to covet. George Bush has it, and now the country has George Bush.

Bush lucked into more than a trend. He is the direct beneficiary of a national obsession. The United States has been on a ten-year binge of crested blazers, polo matches, and English hunting prints, an insatiable mass-market hunger for upper-class totems. Shopping malls that used to be filled with Sears, Symms, and J. C. Penneys are now vulgarity-free zones: from New Jersey to Alaska, five-and-dimes have been replaced by neo-Edwardian outlets of Alcott & Andrews, Ann Taylor, Victoria's Secret, Brooks Brothers, shops that look less like a retail store than a Hollywood set designer's notion of Harvard's Porcellian club. These are interiors that mimic the grandiose Polo store on Madison Avenue, the old Rhinelander mansion that Lauren turned into his flagship shop, which in turn mimics the grand old houses that George and Barbara Bush grew up in.

Snobbery had always sold well. But no one had ever mass-marketed the mystique or so widely popularized the yearning as Bronx-born Ralph Lauren, né Ralph Lipschitz. At $70 a shirt, Ralph Lauren is a household name, but hardly a household product. Like a great politician, he set out his vision. Eager imitators scurried to supply consumers with affordable cachet: The GAP, which has 714 outlets across the country, sells hundreds of thousands of monogrammed shirts a year, and has its own brand of sports shirts, white cotton T-shirts emblazoned with a phony rowing crew insignia—tiny oars crossed across a circle. The English may snobbishly call it "aping the gentry." In America it's called "instant classic."

The Laurenification of America reaches far beyond clothing. Surveying the neoclassical opulence of Philip Johnson's AT&T building in New York and Robert Stern's neo-Georgian mansions, *New York Times* architec-

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Alessandra Stanley covered the 1988 presidential campaign for *Time* magazine.

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ture critic Paul Goldberger recently concluded that Ralph Lauren is the "real design symbol" of our age. He calls the clothes designer a "one-man Bauhaus." Forget high tech. Upscale health spas, like the "Regency" in McLean, Virginia, look like corporate board rooms, with jade-green marble, carved balustrades, upholstered armchairs, and Oriental rugs. Even law firms want to look like law firms. They are exchanging abstract art and the "go-go" spirit for luxuriant 19th-century English and American landscape paintings. Magazine entrepreneur Chris Whittle recently commissioned New York designer Peter Marino to design a new Whittle Communications headquarters in Knoxville, Tennessee. It will be a replica of Christ Church College at Oxford.

Bush would never fall for such falderal. As Nancy Mitford painstakingly explained in a collection of essays, *Noblesse Oblige*, it is strictly non-U, that is, not upper-class, to strive or show off wealth. The Bushes come by their subdued fashion sense the old-fashioned way. They inherited it. To the happy few, Ralph Lauren is of course hopelessly non-U. As president, Bush will be too polite to point out the difference.

WASPs are fashionable again. Playwright A. R. Gurney started writing sly contemporary drawing-room comedies about them and became the toast of Broadway. Glitz-and-glitter TV shows like "Dynasty" went out with Nancy Reagan. The creators of "Hill Street Blues" have turned from blue-collar cops and robbers to prep school heroes in a new TV show, "Tattingers," in which Old Money triumphs over vulgarity week after week. In the first episode, Blythe Danner briskly instructs her marriage-minded debutante daughter, "Go to Yale and get on with your life." Prescott Bush couldn't have said it better when son George returned from the war.

You can't even buy a jug of cheap wine anymore without bumping into the Ralph Lauren sensibility. The "All the Best" Gallo wine TV commercials, in which a gauze-covered camera pans slowly across sunlit vineyards, grandmothers, brides, oak tables, and eternally glistening lawns, are confusing. Is it Gallo, Polo, or Bush for President? Only the narrator knows for sure, and even then, one has to listen carefully: the golden baritone that sonorously recounts the life history of George Bush in political advertisements sounds exactly like the hushed, grave tones used to ennoble Gallo wine.

George Bush never explained what he meant by "Family Values," nor did he really need to. Advertising firms have been making it up for years. Ira Zucherman, senior vice president at Hal Riney and Associates, the firm that peddled Gallo, Perrier, and helped create "Morning Again in America" (Hal Riney himself is that wonderful gravelly voice in the Gallo ads), sums up the message that now dominates commercial advertising: "Traditional Values, Quality, Taste, and a Certain Sense of Heritage." George Bush couldn't have defined his "vision thing" any better. When he informed an Ask George Bush audience that he was running for president "because I believe in the honor of it all," his lips read: "noblesse oblige." His loose-fitting suit, striped tie, and attractive family screamed BCBG, or "Bon Chic, Bon Genre," yet another French expression connoting elegant good breeding.

Digby Baltzell, professor emeritus at the University of Pennsylvania, coined the term WASP in his 1964 book, *The Protestant Establishment*, and has been studying the caste ever since. He despises the voters' preference for log cabin myths and self-made politicians, arguing that the best presidents came from "high backgrounds." Baltzell, who currently detects "a manifest disdain and latent yearning for patricians," is pleased with Bush's election—up to a point. "All the great patricians led the masses against the middle class," he huffs. "Bush seems to be leading the middle classes against minorities."

Politicians are slower on the uptake than merchants. Two summers ago, when Bush aides were fretting over how to overcome the vice president's upper-class twit demeanor, Hugh Barnard, publisher of the "Retail Marketing Report," was advising his subscribers that "fantasy marketing spells big bucks." His newsletter helpfully defined the requisite props: "steamer trunks, antique armoires, life-size paintings of military officers of long-ago wars, upholstered chairs by tables laden with books." Barnard knew instantly that Ralph Lauren had his fingers on the purse, er pulse of the nation. "The American public has become more conservative and tradition-conscious," Barnard says. "People are less impressed with outward glitter, they want stability and classiness." Fifteen years ago, even George Bush didn't want to be George Bush—he chaired

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the Republican National Committee in sideburns and wide psychedelic ties.

THE LESSON from Madison Avenue got lost in the downward mobility contest of the Republican primary. Bob Dole was lording his father's overalls all over everyone else. Pete du Pont tried to claim that his aristocratic ancestors had been mere "scraggly French immigrants" who came to the United States barely better off than Vietnamese boat people. (Du Pont conveniently forgot that his people arrived with a letter of introduction to Thomas Jefferson from Tallyrand.) Bush aides mistakenly assumed Americans would be turned off by Skull and Bones, vacation homes in Maine, and preppy idioms.

Bush took to bragging about eating pork rinds and listening to country-Western music. He became aggressively low-culture. He even insisted at one point that he didn't know the meaning of the word "patrician." He campaigned in Illinois alongside Loretta Lynn and Crystal Gayle and hotly defended his love of Country, at one point challenging *New York Times* reporter Maureen Dowd to enter his bedroom and see for herself that his clock radio was tuned to the country music station—rather like Gary Hart recklessly challenging the newspaper of record to "put a tail on me" and check out his womanizing.

The Bubba vote may have been mollified by Bush's pork rinds and Western props, but nobody else was fooled. Ralph Lauren likes country too, witness his highly successful line of stone-washed denims, earth-tone Western shirts, and pastel bandannas, always artfully laid out against a background of iron cattle gear and Santa Fe-style ceramics. Even Bush's pork rind habit had an *épater les bourgeois* ring to it—it suggested the kind of reverse snobbery that drives Beacon Hill matrons to turn up their noses at Mercedes and buy Chevettes. Besides, WASPs have notoriously gross eating habits. Nouvelle cuisine is aptly named: only the nouveau riche really eat it.

Bush's populist message was always there, voiced in shrill attacks on Dukakis. He painted the governor of Massachusetts as the liberal "elitist" from Harvard Yard, and he wasn't just talking about the Pledge of Allegiance and the American Civil Liberties Union. Bush derided Dukakis as an intellectual snob, a dour Cambridge don who sneers at bourgeois pretenses. Dan Quayle, for once, summed up the aspiring classes' fears the best, saying that Dukakis was "conceited." Dukakis, Quayle argued, "looks down on America." Reagan had turned America into a nation of shoppers, and Dukakis seemed poised with scissors, ready to snip overextended Bloomingdale's credit cards in two. If Mike Dukakis came off as an unreconstructed Ralph Lipschitz, a self-made man who buys his clothes at Filene's basement and despises those who pay more, Bush was The Real Thing, the personification of everything that Ralph Lauren yearns for. Bush, for one, shops at the proper but hardly extravagant Arthur Adler men's store. But then, the rich are different from you and me; they spend less money.

By the time Roger Ailes got around to filming the Bushes *en famille*, the campaign had wised up. Aides who once used to ban still-photographers from filming the outside of the Kennebunkport house—or, as press secretary Sheila Tate instructed reporters, "minimize the edifice, maximize the people"—relaxed.

Certainly, the half-hour George Bush documentary that Ailes aired nationwide the evening before the election was a paean to Bush's patrician background. In one arresting bit of footage, a tanned, chiseled George Bush Jr. sat on a flowered chintz sofa in Kennebunkport, his wife smiling serenely at his side, and ruminated about "Dad." He recalled being accosted by a night bellman in a Cooperstown, New York, hotel who wanted to show him his "most treasured memento": a letter from George Bush, thanking the bellman for getting his pants pressed at an unusual hour. Was it the 1,000 points of light or the 60,000 thank-you notes that put Bush over the top?

After the Republican convention, Bush's aides claimed that the candidate felt "liberated." He soon reverted with relief to Poppy-speak. He referred to negative ads as "the naughty stuff," and in a speech decrying chemical warfare described the effects of nerve gas as "ghastly." Bush dropped pork rinds altogether after election night and returned to his roots, hightailing over to the Florida summer home of William Stamps Farish III, a Kentucky horse breeder and polo player who also manages Bush's blind trust, for a little fishing, tennis, and golf. His choice of locale, Gulf Stream, near Hobe Sound, is a private enclave so exclusive its 550 residents look down at Palm Beach as trashy. On Sunday, Bush attended services with his 87-year-old mother at Christ Memorial Church, which sits conveniently enough on the seventh hole of the Jupiter Island golfing green. Mother Bush, natty in white shoes and a sea-green dress, greeted him while perched regally on a golf cart, a real-life Katharine Hepburn, frail but yar.

THE CULT OF the Haute Bushoisie was helped along, of course, by Ronald Reagan, who made America safe for the rich again. By Inauguration Day, it was "Morning Coat Again in America," a hostile takeover of dowdy Democratic Washington by top hats, tails, furs, jewels, limousines, and the Hollywood Mafia. But Reagan's era glorified style, not taste. Now the pendulum has swung away from Frank Sinatra, Galanos, Chuck Heston, and the Hollywood make-believe glamour that Sidney Blumenthal, co-author of *The Reagan Legacy*, calls a "neo-kitsch aesthetic." After eight years America yearned for better breeding.

Barbara Bush proudly tells friends that the three strands of clam-sized pearls she always wears are fakes, worn mainly to conceal the wrinkles around her neck. Like her husband, Mrs. Bush has no snooty airs. She is too self-assured to stoop to Nancy Reagan's habit of "borrowing" diamond necklaces from Van Cleef and Arpels and passing them off as her own. The appeal of the Reagans partying until dawn with nouveau riche septuagenarians is spent. Bush represents what a glitz-sated, but still socially aspiring nation has been taught to yearn for: a kinder, gentler snobbery. □

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AN EXCHANGE ON THE ACLU

To the editors:

When George Bush began to attack the ACLU a few months ago, he did so on the basis of charges that were both inaccurate and misleading. When we and others pointed out those inaccuracies, the nature of the criticism changed.

Our critics seem now to have conceded that many important rights that Americans enjoy today are the result of ACLU cases. We are grateful for that concession, however late it is in coming. But, these critics now say, the ACLU isn't what it once was. Once it devoted itself to pure civil liberties, but today it is dominated by "a new agenda of exotic left-wing causes."

Mark Campisano's article in the October 31 issue of THE NEW REPUBLIC is an example of this new criticism. According to Mr. Campisano, there was a good ACLU now replaced by a wicked ACLU. The good ACLU existed from its beginnings in 1920 to about 1955.

What are examples of this wonderful work? Mr. Campisano cites six: the *Scopes* case, in which we challenged the power of a state to write Genesis into the law; the *Ulysses* case, in which we challenged book censorship based on charges of obscenity; the *Hague* v. *CIO* case, one of many in which we defended the rights of workers to organize; the *Korematsu* case, in which we challenged the wartime internment of Americans of Japanese descent; the *Barnette* case, in which we helped invalidate state laws requiring Jehovah's Witness schoolchildren to salute the flag; and *Brown* v. *Board of Education*, in which we supported the NAACP's challenge to school segregation.

These cases, says Mr. Campisano, represent civil liberties principles that "had a real value for American society" and do not reflect a left-wing agenda. We are glad to have him say so. But at the time we were litigating those cases, few people agreed that they "had a real value for American society," and a good many thought they reflected a left-wing agenda.

In the *Scopes* case, we were accused of trying to destroy religion and bar it from public life. In the *Ulysses* case, we were accused of promoting obscenity and lowering moral standards. In the labor case, we were widely accused of harboring a left-wing agenda, for that is how the labor movement was perceived in those days. In *Korematsu*, we were the only national organization to challenge the internment of Japanese-Americans in court, and we were accused of disloyalty or worse. In the *Barnette* case, our patriotism was questioned and we were attacked in precisely the same terms that George Bush has attacked those who today challenge flag salute requirements. And in the *Brown* case and its progeny, our involvement in the effort to combat race discrimination produced more hate mail than any other subject.

Indeed, every one of the criticisms Mr. Campisano levels at us now was leveled at us then. But the ACLU efforts of the 1930s and 1940s resulted in values that are today firmly established in American life.

Mr. Campisano's thesis is that a new agenda of "exotic left-wing causes" occupies "most" of the ACLU's time and energy. Yet all the old causes Mr. Campisano cites as examples of the good ACLU are heavily reflected in the ACLU's current priorities.

In the 1980s we challenged creationism laws in Arkansas and Louisiana, as we did in the *Scopes* case in 1925. Throughout the 1980s we opposed waves of censorship as we had in the *Ulysses* case in 1933. Our defense of free speech during the past 30 years for civil rights demonstrators, anti-war demonstrators, neo-Nazis in Skokie, the Klan, anti-abortion demonstrators, and gay rights demonstrators has been a core ACLU activity built on the principles established when we defended free speech for labor unions in the 1920s and 1930s. Mandatory-salute-the-flag cases still appear regularly on local ACLU dockets. And since 1954 we have greatly expanded our efforts to eliminate racial discrimination and its vestiges—in education, employment, housing, and voting.

If Mr. Campisano liked us in the old days, he should love us now. But he does not. Why? The ACLU, he suggests darkly, "underwent a major transformation" in the 1960s and "adopted a new agenda and raison d'être." Does he quote from ACLU leaders as evidence? No. Does he rely on a serious analysis of our work before and since 1960? No. Of the hundreds of legislative positions we take, he cites none; of the thousands of cases we handle, he cites very few. Well, then on what does he rely? A handful of anecdotes.

Space does not permit us to respond to each of Mr. Campisano's anecdotal references, but a few should illustrate the quality of his evidence.

His first example of the ACLU's "major transformation" is that we believe that airport security checkpoints violate the right against unreasonable searches. The ACLU board passed that policy in 1973, when airport searches were, in some places, still highly discriminatory, singling out blacks or people with long hair for intrusive searches. That doesn't happen much anymore, if at all. As a result, in the last decade the ACLU has not challenged airport metal detectors in court or issued a single public statement opposing them.

Mr. Campisano next mentions our opposition to public school dress codes. During the late 1960s hundreds of female students were suspended from school because principals thought they shouldn't be allowed to wear pants on cold winter days. Why? Because school officials thought that girls ought to wear skirts. Was that sex discrimination and an abuse of authority? We thought so. So did the parents who came to us to help get their children back in school.

Mr. Campisano broadly accuses us of "hostility to the processes of constitutional democracy." His leading example is an affirmative action case in Virginia, now pending in the U.S. Supreme Court.

Mr. Campisano's characterization of the Virginia case reveals a propensity to distort facts. First, he says that we are supporting a program that would "force" the city of Richmond, Virginia, to award a specified percentage of its public works contracts to minority-owned businesses. That is not true. Richmond *voluntarily adopted*

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an affirmative action program to remedy the present effects of past discrimination. The ACLU is not in court to "force" Richmond to do anything; we are *defending* the *elected* city officials of Richmond who instituted this plan. Mr. Campisano also says that we and Richmond believe that "individual merit no longer matters," which is not true. It was past racial discrimination that ignored individual merit; Richmond's plan proposes to remedy that.

Mr. Campisano goes on to cite our work supporting reproductive freedom as a major example of the ACLU's general "distrust of democracy." He apparently believes that only legislatures should be able to decide whether a woman can choose an abortion. But a primary purpose of the American system is to insulate people's constitutional rights from legislatures, from what James Madison called the superior force of "an interested and overbearing majority."

The ACLU harbors no general distrust of democracy. But we exist primarily to defend constitutional rights against excesses of the majority. Mr. Campisano argues that women should not have a constitutional right to reproductive freedom. But the Supreme Court has disagreed for 15 years. Mr. Campisano has a right to differ on the merits. But he hasn't argued the merits. And he certainly can't infer from this issue a general ACLU distrust of democracy. To the contrary, the ACLU has handled more voting rights cases to expand the franchise than any other organization in America.

Mr. Campisano also chides us for "unbalanced views" on the rights of people suspected of committing crimes. Our defense of such constitutional rights, he says, "exalts the desires of individuals without serious regard for genuine countervailing interests of society as a whole." We suppose he means the old Edwin Meese refrain that rules like the *Miranda* rule and the exclusionary rule are an impediment to law enforcement and seriously compromise public safety. In fact, many studies show, and virtually all law enforcement officials we have consulted agree, that these constitutional rules are not an impediment to law enforcement and do not compromise public safety. Mr. Campisano repeats the old canard without citing a shred of contrary evidence.

Mr. Campisano also criticizes the ACLU's opposition to police airplane surveillance without a warrant in a case involving sophisticated cameras used to observe a family sunbathing and swimming in its backyard. Sixty years ago the ACLU endured similar criticism for opposing a wiretapping and electronic surveillance conducted without a warrant. Today courts uniformly recognize that such technology allows the police to intrude on people's privacy in a way that violates the Fourth Amendment. The same will hold true, we believe, with camera surveillance of our private moments and places.

NORMAN DORSEN AND IRA GLASSER

Norman Dorsen is president and Ira Glasser is executive director of the American Civil Liberties Union.

In reply:

Dorsen and Glasser claim that my criticisms are based on a "handful of anecdotes." My analysis was actually based on a statistical breakdown of the ACLU's caseload in the years 1943, 1965, and 1987. Dorsen and Glasser know this, because my statistics were published on the editorial page of the *Wall Street Journal*. Why don't they mention my *Journal* article in their rebuttal? And why don't they try to rebut my statistical breakdown of their caseload? Maybe they've tried, and know that they can't.

Dorsen and Glasser argue that the ACLU always encountered widespread opposition in the past. That's just bad history. Outside of Tennessee, the *Scopes* prosecution was derided as a backwoods absurdity. At the time of *Hague* v. *CIO*, Mayor Hague was a notorious political boss, and his comeuppance at the ACLU's hands was widely applauded. *Barnette*'s invalidation of flag salute laws was greeted with widespread relief. As for *Brown* v. *Board of Education*, a Gallup poll several days after the decision found that it enjoyed approval ratings of 72 percent in the East, 57 percent in the Midwest, and 65 percent in the West.

But suppose that the ACLU always *had* been hated. So what? Dorsen and Glasser reason as follows: "1. We were hated in the old days, but our actions back then are applauded today. 2. We are hated today. 3. *Therefore*, our actions today will be applauded tomorrow." That's an elementary error in logic.

Fine distinctions seem to elude Dorsen and Glasser. Do you see any difference between James Joyce's *Ulysses* and an open-crotch shot in *Hustler*? Dorsen and Glasser don't: opposition to either one is just "censorship." Do you see any difference between racial equality of opportunity and a mandatory system of racial hiring quotas? Dorsen and Glasser don't: both serve to "eliminate racial discrimination." Do you see any difference between removing barriers to voting and gerrymandering electoral districts to ensure that a candidate of a particular race will almost inevitably win? Dorsen and Glasser don't: both actions "expand the franchise."

Sometimes Dorsen and Glasser seem to be living in the past. We hear about searches of people with long hair in 1973, and schoolgirls on cold winter days in the '60s. Hey guys, this is your wake-up call: it's 1988. If these things aren't problems anymore, why not admit it and change your policy guide? But no: in the paranoid worldview of today's ACLU, every cop has a pig inside him, trying to get out.

At other times, Dorsen and Glasser simply insult your intelligence. They make much of the fact that the racial quotas in *Richmond* were "*voluntarily adopted*" by "*elected* city officials." But the "separate but equal" school systems struck down in *Brown* v. *Board of Education* were "voluntarily adopted," too. Did that make them OK? Of course not, and the ACLU didn't hesitate to attack deliberate racial discrimination back then. The real question raised by *Richmond* is, Why does *today*'s ACLU *support* deliberate racial discrimination? Dorsen and Glasser say that they're simply "defending the elected city officials of Richmond." All of a sudden, they sound like Lester Maddox. But wait: just a few sentences later, Dorsen and Glasser say that the ACLU exists "primarily to defend constitutional rights against excesses of the majority."

MARK S. CAMPISANO

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STANLEY KAUFFMANN ON FILMS

Talents in Transit

The publicity bells are pealing for Pedro Almodóvar, ringing out the news that his latest film will be his breakthrough in America. This pealing is a pity. Almodóvar deserves to break through, as far as a foreign filmmaker can, but this is not his best film to be shown here, and if it doesn't win him an audience, the publicity may backfire. His better films—in the past and, very possibly, the future—will have a tougher time.

Women on the Verge of a Nervous Breakdown
(Orion Classics)
Full Moon in Blue Water
(Trans World)
Hello Actors Studio
(Actors Studio)

All his screenplays (he writes his own) have had a mordant tone, and all his directing has shown a keen sense of the visual. It's strange, however, that when he concentrates strenuously on visual virtuosity, the level of his screenplays drops. *What Have I Done to Deserve This?*, directed with sufficient confidence, had a wittily organized, tart script. The two that followed, *Dark Habits* and *Matador*, had much more cinematic flourish and much more problematic scripts. His latest, a farce called *Women on the Verge of a Nervous Breakdown*, has his most pyrotechnical direction and his weakest screenplay to date.

The contrast goes further. This director who insists on giving his filmmaking cinematic high polish has here done his least cinematic writing. *Women* is quintessentially a one-set play that has been opened up for filming. Plenty of scenes take place elsewhere, and there's an auto chase to the airport near the end, but the picture's home is the heroine's apartment; with skillful adaptation, it could—if one wanted—be kept there.

Again the place is Madrid, again the leading woman is Carmen Maura, an Almodóvar veteran. She plays a TV actress who also does commercials and who has just lost her married lover. Her attempts to speak to him before he scoots off to Stockholm with another woman; the intrusion into her apartment of a girlfriend hiding from the police; the arrival of her ex-lover's son and his fiancée who have come to see about renting Maura's apartment; jokes with an answering machine, with telephones thrown through windows, with bumbling detectives, with gazpacho heavily laced with sleeping pills—these are some of the ingredients of this fast-moving farce. But we merely watch it whizzing around trying to amuse us.

Almodóvar has a serious flaw for a man who wants to make us laugh, especially at social satire. He is so far only an accountant of comedy: that is, he enters items in a ledger (his script) and can prove that they ought to add up to laughs. He seems sealed off from communication, self-satisfied with his humor. The Marx Brothers used to take their material on tour to test it before they filmed it; maybe Almodóvar should copy.

As a director, he's a bit of a showoff but is briskly inventive. He uses the colors of cheap ads—Sunday supplement colors—for the homes and clothes of people who lead Sunday-supplement lives. His editing and pacing are impatient. He jogs us continually with unusual camera angles—for instance, a shot through a pair of eyeglasses that have fallen on the floor. He casts à la Fellini, using a gallery of faces more than an ensemble of actors. In Maura, who somewhat resembles Irene Papas, he has a genuine actress of range and strength. Here she rides the waves of the ridiculous like a serious woman who knows how to surf. But the waves are sluggish.

In one way *Full Moon in Blue Water* resembles *Women*: it, too, seems like a one-set play that has been opened up. This is not a farce but a comedy drama set in—oh, dread locale—a roadside café. There's an American subgenre of plays and films set in roadside cafés, of which Sherwood's *The Petrified Forest* (1935) is probably not the first, and by now that setting doesn't exactly arouse confidence in the author's originality.

Bill Bozzone, the author of this screenplay, quickly goes on to justify our lack of confidence. The characters are all setups. Gene Hackman, very moody, owns this café on Galveston Bay and has an assistant, Elias Koteas, who is recently out of a mental hospital. Hackman has no wife on the premises (she disappeared a year earlier), but her father, Burgess Meredith, a salty old reprobate in a wheelchair, is very much on hand. Teri Garr, who drives the local school bus, is the woman who consoles Hackman for his loneliness, as she has consoled other locals. Also involved are a sleazy politician, a sleazy real estate man, and a sleazy sheriff.

These non-promising materials keep their non-promise. Only two elements are notable. First is the excellent lighting by Fred Murphy, the cinematographer who shot Huston's *The Dead*. Second is the fact that Hackman is in it. We're told that he is one of the busiest American actors. If he doesn't lack for offers, he must have accepted this script because he believes it is good. That thought is depressing. *Full Moon* was directed by Peter

FILMS WORTH SEEING

A Cry in the Dark. Dramatization of a recent Australian murder case. Meryl Streep as the mother of a murdered infant. Hardly her best-written role, but Streep collectors will not want to miss it. (Reviewed 12/5/88)

Far North. Sam Shepard's disorderly and delightful tall tale of today—a Minnesota family's disruptions chiefly because of Pa's hatred of the family horse. Jessica Lange and Charles Durning are especially in tune with Shepard's lyric looniness. (11/28/88)

Hotel Terminus. Klaus Barbie, before, during, and after his bloody career. Marcel Ophuls's documentary is overlong and discursive, but it has strengths. (10/24/88)

The Last Temptation of Christ. A good performance by Willem Dafoe and furious, if occasionally breathless, direction by Martin Scorsese make some episodes highly affecting. (9/12&19/88)

SK

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Masterson with clichés of "humanity" comparable to those in the writing.

Masterson, who is a member of the Actors Studio, is briefly visible in a three-part, 165-minute documentary called *Hello Actors Studio*, which was made for French TV. (The film is distributed by the Actors Studio and was shown in New York at the Film Forum.)

The home of the Method, a term that can still start arguments, the Studio was founded in 1947 primarily as a workplace for professionals. It now numbers among its members (there's no such thing as an alumnus—once a member, always a member) some of the most celebrated names in American theater and film. This documentary features interviews with, among many others, Paul Newman, Ellen Burstyn (the two most engaging of the lot), Elia Kazan, Sydney Pollack, and Shelley Winters. We also see scenes being done before members and hear comments by the observers. The general attitude is gratitude and devotion, particularly because the studio is a place where (a favorite tag) the actor can try "dangerous" things.

In 1963 I was invited to be an observer at classes run by Lee Strasberg, the guru of the Studio who died in 1982, and I attended for a while. The scenes performed in this documentary are in essence much like what I saw in my visits. The material is ultrarealistic; the comments, by teachers and observers, smack of group analysis. Explorations are usually of the actor's self, his or her emotional honesty. This is hardly unimportant, but some other equally important subjects are rarely mentioned, chief among them technique.

In *The Magic Lantern* Ingmar Bergman writes of accompanying his then wife, a pianist, to her lessons with a master teacher. Bergman notes the "rigorous standards," "a phrase plucked apart into its constituent parts, practiced . . . for hours, then reassembled when the time was ripe":

> I listened to [the teacher] and thought about theater, about myself and actors, our sloppiness, our ignorance. . . . We certainly have had a number of outstanding actors who lack basic technique.

Hello Actors Studio would not do much to reassure him about theater training on his point.

Still, inarguably, the Studio is internationally influential, and a documentary about it is certainly in order. Annie Trest has made it quite adequately and quite uncritically, which is probably in order, too. □

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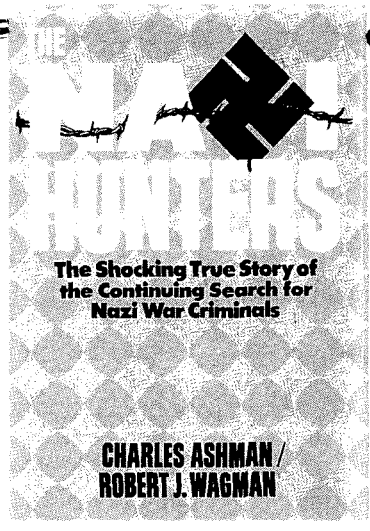
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ROBERT BRUSTEIN ON THEATER

Godot in LaLa Land

It would be easy enough to satirize Mike Nichols's production of *Waiting For Godot*. I can imagine Nichols himself doing a skit on it with Elaine May. By casting two comedy superstars as Didi and Gogo, by setting the play in what appears to be Death Valley, and by calling this Lincoln Center offering "A Mike Nichols Production," the director invites

Waiting For Godot
by Samuel Beckett
(Mitzi Newhouse Theater)

Cafe Crown
by Hy Kraft
(New York Public Theater)

charges that he has Hollywoodized an existential masterpiece—carbonated the philosophical heavy water, fizzed up the tragicomic metaphysics. This celebrity gathering not only features Steve Martin and Robin Williams as the tramps, but F. Murray Abraham as Pozzo, Bill Irwin as Lucky, and Lukas Haas (the child in *Witness*) as the Boy.

Since for eight weeks only they are occupying the 299-seat Mitzi Newhouse Theater (plans for a Broadway run fell through because of the stars' conflicting schedules), it can't even be argued that Hollywood names were needed to ensure a commercial success. Indeed, subscribers are said to be incensed over the shortage of tickets. They're not missing a whole lot; the production expunges both the poetry and the pain of the play. Williams and Martin are very accomplished comedians. Under other circumstances, perhaps, they might have proved equal to their demanding roles (Williams, at least, has the vocal equipment). But either they've been encouraged to regard *Godot* as a scenario for improvisation or they've been inspired by the standard *Godot* criticism that the tramps have an affinity with the great clowns of silent films and music hall: Chaplin, Keaton, Laurel and Hardy. Without understanding a word of it, Bert Lahr played Estragon brilliantly in the first New York production with the more stolid E. G. Marshall as Vladimir, and Kurt Kasznar and Alvin Epstein as Pozzo and Lucky. But while the leading parts have roots in vaudeville, this is no reason for turning the entire play into stand-up comedy. Beginning with an ominous rumble and a rimshot, the evening realizes only the rimshot.

Abraham and Irwin, on the other hand, are very accomplished actors, and during their two scenes on stage the play begins to resonate. Abraham's voice was frayed the night I saw him, but he managed to turn that handicap into an asset, croaking a performance that exactly caught the alternating imperiousness and helplessness of the role. And Irwin was a consummate Lucky—prematurely aged, unconscious of the running rope-burn sores on his neck, sand dancing on sand, creating a fanatically focused stoicism out of pain and bondage. Trained as a mime, Irwin has been growing into a fine actor, one I have previously underestimated. It's a shame his only opportunity for speech, Lucky's "Given the existence" monologue, was almost completely obliterated by Williams's horseplay.

Williams, looking like a Western hobo under the turned-up brim of his derby, is a performer with a special relationship to the audience. It constitutes both his strength and his weakness. A number of his lines were delivered to the house, often embroidered with quotes from popular culture: he nasalized the theme from "Twilight Zone," twanged "Amazing Grace" on an imaginary Jew's harp, did macho John Wayne impersonations, turning a rusty automobile exhaust pipe into a machine gun. He's a very funny fellow, and one has to admire his audacity. But it's one thing to be irrepressible, another uncontrollable: his interruptions of Lucky's speech (Beckett calls for a "protest") were downright incorrigible. He not only threw Irwin to the ground, as the text requires, but emitted bored yelps while sitting in the audience and reading a spectator's program (at one performance, I'm told, he was asked to autograph it—an entirely appropriate response under the circumstances). Williams never touched Gogo's vulnerability or managed to convince us he was really unhappy. His anomie proceeded from irritability, not despair; the lyrical exchanges with Didi came off as arguments, not invocations. Gogo is a poet, but Williams's manic energy has its sources in prose.

Martin, on the other hand, was more subdued, but not nearly as interesting. His light voice provides his acting with no emotional ballast. Some touches were nice, such as when (like a Laker dunking a basket) he attempted to place a derby on Lucky's head without getting kicked or when he pretended to be a Big Ben chiming the hours over Gogo's prostrate body or when he suffered a kidney attack after being libeled as a "critic." But Martin's inner and outer landscape, despite a growth of beard, are too cleanly contoured to accommodate the rough surfaces of this forlorn character. His persona is ultimately too California bland.

So is the production. It has been carefully calibrated, meticulously orchestrated. It is filled with precision, detail, clear choices. It never releases your attention. Yet, somehow, Beckett's European penumbra has been illuminated in all its darkest corners by a sunny American disposition. Mike Nichols is working, as usual, with very gifted collaborators—Tony Walton on sets, Ann Roth on costumes, Jennifer Tipton on lighting—and what they have wrought on the tiny Newhouse stage is miraculous. But I fear that Nichols's specific behaviorist approach to his material, appropriate enough for American realistic writing, distorts a work that draws its strength from abstraction.

Beckett left his setting for *Waiting For Godot* deliberately unspecified ("A country road. A tree"). This production places us, as I mentioned earlier, in a California desert. I'm told that Beckett himself authorized the change of "Macon" (and "Crackon") country to "Napa" (and "Crapa") country, but it's hard for me to believe that he would have authorized such a radical shift in geography. There may be no vineyards bordering the premises, but there's an ocher-and-tan Western sky beaming over tons of sand, no doubt borrowed from Peter Brooks's *Carmen* at the upstairs Beaumont. There is, besides, an abundance of identifiable hubcaps, automobile springs, license plates, bones, stones, and Georgia O'Keeffe cattle skulls—so many, in fact, that the amnesia of the tramps regarding whether or not they've visited this area before begins to verge on idiocy. I am hardly in a strong position to criticize deviations from Beckett's published stage directions, when a production of *Endgame* at my own theater, to the playwright's everlasting chagrin, was set in an abandoned subway station, but Beckett intended *Godot* to be situated in a generalized purgatory. And regardless what you think of California—even if you agree

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with Gertrude Stein that "there's no there there"—it still remains a little too site-specific to capture the abstract metaphysics of the play.

Finally, Nichols's impulse to prove the truth of *Godot*'s advertising claim (in the original Broadway production) to be "the laugh sensation of two continents" recalls his treatment of David Rabe's *Hurly Burly*, a migraine play that he softened into a comic anodyne. He remains one of the cleverest American directors with no peer in casting savvy, stagecraft, or skill in handling actors. What he lacks, either through indifference, shallowness, or cynicism, is the willingness to probe beneath the outer membrane of denser material.

CAFE CROWN at the New York Public Theater is a pleasant if somewhat assimilated revival of Hy Kraft's dramatic memoir (written in 1940) about the waning days of Yiddish theater. Although the play is weak, it is still a reasonably enjoyable way to spend an evening, especially for those old enough to feel nostalgic about the great actors—Jacob Adler, Boris Thomashefsky, Maurice Schwartz, Molly Picon, Menasha Skulnick—who consumed tea and stuffed derma between shows at a restaurant called the Cafe Royale. It is even more evocative of rude Jewish waiters, those terrorists of Second Avenue whose beady stares and acid tongues were usually a prelude to slammed plates and stained tablecloths. My father had such a waiter at a restaurant called The Grove. His name was Peretz, and one day when he was scurrying past the table scratching his behind, my father asked him: "What's the matter, Peretz, you got hemorrhoids?" To which the harried waiter replied: "Mr. Brustein, don't bother me, I'm in a big hurry. If it's on the menu, we got it."

I promise not to bore you with any more anecdotes, though I've got a few more in my repertoire (for a short time I acted on the Yiddish stage and hung out at those cafés). But the major appeal of *Cafe Crown* is the way it stirs up memories of a lost golden age. If you don't have access to such nostalgia, the evening may not be your glass of tea, since it's very weak on character and the plot turns are absurd. The story, for example, revolves around the efforts of the actor-producer David Cole (based on Jacob Adler) to mount a Yiddish version of *King Lear* set on Riverside Drive and featuring an actor who is being tapped for Broadway. That's credible enough, given the appeal of *Lear* to all Jewish parents who think their children are ungrateful (which is to say, all Jewish parents). Where credibility falters is in the fact that the actor cast as Lear, though famous for beard roles, is in his 20s. And when was the last time the Yiddish Actors Union admitted any actor into its ranks under the age of 45?

The plot and ensuing love complications are resolved in an equally unconvincing fashion, but *Cafe Crown* is distinguished not so much for dramaturgy as for local color. In an affectionate reconstruction of bygone restaurant decor by Santo Loquasto, right down to pickles on the table and Yiddish newspapers on the racks (also a copy of *Time*!), the diners and pinochle players come and go, speaking of kreplach and onion rolls. Sam the waiter (Fyvush Finkel) maneuvers his way among the tables ("Hot stuff coming up") while Hymie the proprietor answers the phone with cries of "Cafe Crown speaking—Who?" moaning about his daughter in "Bryn Mare—Ma?—More?" Eager to invest in any David Cole production so long as it isn't Shakespeare, Bob Dishy's Hymie is a particularly accurate embodiment of the mournful sobriety of this world—his shoulders slumped, his eyes half-closed, lumbering through his estab-

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lishment like an arthritic penguin.

Eli Wallach plays the famous Yiddish actor, David Cole, plagued with financial woes, a quarrelsome wife, and an actress daughter (Stella Adler?) who prefers Broadway and Hollywood to the indigent charms of family enterprises. He performs the part with energy and flair, in a black slouch hat and fur-collared coat rakishly thrown over his shoulder. But the character is just a touch too flamboyant for Wallach's stylized realism; what it requires is a great Jewish ham. And where are the Yiddish accents in Martin Charnin's recreation of this Yiddish world? Gone with the wind round the heart that followed the fried food. The play has a syrupy conclusion with all issues happily resolved, including the means to let the play proceed while allowing the young hero to go to Hollywood on opening night. But so what? If it doesn't sate your appetite for drama, it will certainly make you hunger for a good bowl of kasha and a couple of salt rolls.

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The Letters of T. S. Eliot: Volume I, 1898-1922
edited by Valerie Eliot

(Harcourt Brace Jovanovich, 639 pp., $29.95)

Eliot's New Life
by Lyndall Gordon

(Farrar, Straus & Giroux, 347 pp., $19.95)

To a poetical person of my generation, the last three or four months have been (at least where I am now, in the United Kingdom) very trying. For us, inescapably, the figure of Thomas Stearns Eliot had always been central. He was the *exemplum* to extol, to quarrel with, to acknowledge respectfully even as we cruised on courses a few degrees off from what he had laid down. He was the landmark, or the seamark, that one sailed by.

As his centenary year unfolded, however, publications horribly persuaded us that Eliot was neither a hero-martyr of his art, nor a pernicious traitor to it (both these possibilities we had taken on board and dealt with); that he was, more appallingly, simply ordinary. We have learned that his eminence, unquestionable in the years of our youth, was due to his commonplaceness, abetted by a brisk proficiency in manipulating the market.

To be sure, there is no pretending that this broke upon us as a thunderclap. There had been rumors, sometimes sufficiently documented, that Eliot the man had failed to live up to Eliot the poet. Details had leaked out about the poet's first marriage, more particularly about how brutally, and from what a brutal distance, he had terminated it. F. R. Leavis, and a few others more devout, had pointed out how glancingly this allegedly Christian poet, author of *Four Quartets*, passed over both Incarnation and Redemption. And from the first, nobody had been able to ignore the disgust with which Eliot regarded the act of sexual congress. The reluctance of the Eliot estate, moreover, to release documents to biographers, and the inordinate delays in editing his letters, enforced the suspicion that something was being covered up.

Now we have a first volume of the letters—not complete, only "the significant extant letters Eliot wrote up to age 34"—and we can see, past the editorial obstructions, just what has been covered up. It is not Eliot's wickedness (he was not specially wicked), nor his insensibilities and disloyalties, but simply his commonplaceness. At every stage of his life, as a Harvard student, as an Oxford student, as a publisher and a London clubman, Eliot fell into line with the habits and the pretensions of his peers.

We had long ago manned and fortified our fallback position. Even as college students we had learned how to deal with, how to bracket off, the badness of Bad Lord Byron, the cherished and exultantly proclaimed depravity of Baudelaire. Who, we learned to ask loudly, had laid down the rule that good or great poets had to be nice people? And in recent years, as biographers have established beyond doubt the mean-mindedness of Thomas Hardy and Robert Frost (to stop with them), we have had to insist ever more firmly that the worthiness of the poet was not at all impaired by the unworthiness of the person.

But somehow, as revelations came out to salute Eliot's centenary year, we found (at least I did) that we could not trot out these well-tried excuses once again. The furtiveness and unfeelingness of the poet, particularly in his relations with women, stuck in a throat that had managed to swallow the human inadequacies of Byron and Baudelaire, of Hardy and Frost. And when *The Church Times*, the organ of the Church of England, saluted the occasion by hailing Eliot as one thoroughly Christian poet, one came to see that, whereas vested interests had rallied to the defense of Frost and even of Hardy, more powerful (because more institutionalized) interests were determined to turn a blind eye to Eliot's evasions and perfidies. Could we ever hereafter read Eliot's poems with the admiration we had felt in the past? The question, to say the least, was moot.

Perhaps no one is so much to blame as Ezra Pound. One registers without any sympathy at all the shudders of distaste at Pound's thrust and hustle; and all over again, reading letters from Pound (for Mrs. Eliot usefully includes some letters that Eliot received, among those he wrote), we catch our breath admiringly at Pound's generosity and decisiveness. Here was one live individual moving among the half-dead. All the same, the poems by Eliot that so momentously persuaded Pound of their author's genius were too few and too slender to sustain the program for life that Pound immediately erected for Eliot on that foundation. Eliot was one of the half-dead, would declare it (*had* declared it) and would take that condition for his subject matter through the rest of his writing career. It is not good enough to say Pound had no way of knowing that the author of "The Love Song of J. Alfred Prufrock" was in many ways, and in particular sexually, less than adult.

To be sure, Eliot seemed sufficiently composed and knowledgeable, very sophisticated in fact. But the poems that bowled Pound over were notable for flair and audacity, not for moral insight, nor for any assurance beyond the technical. On the basis of the

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it seems clear, Pound persuaded his fellow-poet that his future lay in literature, not philosophy; in London, not the United States—a future to which Eliot then and there committed himself, burning his boats in the only way that his family couldn't argue with, by rushing to marry Vivienne Haigh-Wood. And the poem that afterward brought him fame and fortune, *The Waste Land*, was—as we have known for 15 years—almost as much Pound's work as it was Eliot's. It is only along these lines that we can feel sympathy for Eliot, and compassion: he was compelled, by Pound's entrepreneurial skills (and his own), into an eminence that he wasn't prepared for and could not sustain—as some of the time, to begin with, he wretchedly knew.

Peter Ackroyd, who seems to have got less than full cooperation from the Eliot estate when writing his own life of Eliot (it appeared in 1984), is one of several reviewers who have complained about not finding a letter of April 7, 1921, from Eliot to Richard Aldington. Replying to his strictures in a letter to the *Times* on October 5, Mrs. Eliot explained that she did not know until then of this letter, promised to print it in full in an appendix to her Volume Two, and for good measure provided, then and there, the whole of the letter's final paragraph. The candor of this was unfortunately a little smirched, since the *Times* published, immediately below Valerie Eliot's letter, one from Michael Hastings, who, as author of the 1984 play *Tom and Viv*, seems understandably to have had only frosty relations with Mrs. Eliot and with Eliot's publisher. Hastings revealed that the missing letter had survived in a place where Valerie Eliot might well have looked for it: among the papers of Eliot's brother-in-law, Maurice Haigh-Wood, who showed it to Hastings in 1979. Moreover, Hastings wrote of a series of letters from Eliot to Sacheverel Sitwell in the 1920s, still in existence in 1980, not drawn on for this volume. Add to this Ackroyd's confident assertion that there are letters to Percy Wyndham Lewis that the editor has "passed over," and inevitably the suspicion grows that this book is a whitewash job.

It is not easy to be the relict of a famous poet; but Valerie Eliot seems to have conceived of, and discharged, her responsibilities in a way to get the worst of all worlds. For even as she has given the impression of covering up, what she has uncovered is sufficiently damning in any case. Consider only the controversial sentences to Aldington, which she has now, under pressure from Ackroyd, revealed:

> Having only contempt for every existing political party, and profound hatred for democracy, I feel the blackest gloom. Whatever happens will be another step toward the destruction of Europe. The whole of contemporary politics etc. oppresses me with a continuous physical horror like the feeling of a growing madness in one's brain. It is rather a horror to be sane in the midst of this; it is too dreadful, too huge for one to have the comforting feeling of superiority. It goes too far for rage.

Who asked young Mr. Eliot from St. Louis to take on responsibility for all Europe?

These anti-democratic sentiments cannot surprise anyone who has studied Eliot even a little. Nor are they, in themselves, shocking. What shocks is the tone of lofty petulance in which they are uttered, a tone not different from that of a letter six years before, which Mrs. Eliot prints, to Isabella Stewart Gardner, rather plainly building on a slight acquaintance with that wealthy and influential woman:

> On the 14 Juillet I was in Brussels, having come from Ostende, Bruges, Ghent, and Antwerp. Two days later I was in Germany, and in a fortnight I wished myself well out of Germany. Not that the people were not very kind to me—the Germans have that hospitality and cordiality which characterizes the less civilized peoples. And not that I wish the Germans to be crushed—but France is so important, and defeat would do the French so much harm! This alone outweighs any consideration of right and wrong in my mind.

Now, contrast W. B. Yeats in 1924:

> The stream has turned backwards, and generations to come will have for their task, not the widening of liberty, but recovery from its errors—the building up of authority, the restoration of discipline, the discovery of a life sufficiently heroic to live without the opium dream.

The sentiments are just as anti-democratic; and in the light of later history just as baleful. But Yeats's tone is measured and solemn, where Eliot's is supercilious and glib.

Lyndall Gordon has access to sources of illumination closed to other biographers. Where those others would see only puerility in Eliot's putting firecrackers under Geoffrey Faber's desk on the Fourth of July, Gordon sees a protective mask for the one real enterprise of Eliot's mature life: the saving of his soul. Of *his* soul, be

DRAWING BY VINT LAWRENCE FOR THE NEW REPUBLIC

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it understood. The deaths of thousands in the London blitz were merely noises off, part of the scenario—"To Eliot, war, as a historical event, was peripheral to its private moral meaning . . ."; "for Eliot, the historical event of the Blitz was, in Emersonian terms, a token of his being and becoming . . ."; "Eliot was animated, not harrowed, by the horrific scene . . ."

Heaven save us all from "Emersonian terms"! But these are the methods of biographical divination that Gordon presumably transmits to her Oxford students, sustained by an inwardness with New England tradition that, she is eager to assure us, Eliot shared. By the same token, whereas the worldly biographer will see in Emily Hale a New England spinster cruelly kept on a string and exploited by the poet through 40 years, only to be brutally rejected in the end, Gordon sees her as the Beatrice to Eliot's Dante, "a convenient focus for Eliot's evolving idea of love": a role that, Gordon has the grace to acknowledge, Emily neither understood nor agreed to, never having been asked. In the 1940s and 1950s, true to his Atlantic Alliance evenhandedness, Eliot handed out just the same treatment to the English "good sport," Mary Trevelyan. In the drama that Eliot made of his life—a more lurid melodrama than Christianity, except in its New England version, gives warrant for—Vivienne Haigh-Wood and Emily Hale and Mary Trevelyan have only walk-on parts. The ravenousness of this egotism we cannot help but see reflected in the poems, rather more in *Four Quartets* than in *The Waste Land*.

If Gordon's confessedly speculative procedure can be faulted in the abstract, it must be admitted that, wittingly or not, she has compiled a powerful brief for the prosecution. Gordon seems only intermittently aware of the enormity of what she is disclosing. She is debunking without meaning to. (But this may have been her cunning; her book has an indignant feminist subtext that is the more telling for being submerged.)

Gordon writes:

> For Eliot, the letter was his least distinctive mode. He wrote hundreds of reserved letters; one might say that he was adept at the reserved letters: the kindly let-down to would-be poets, the business letter, the distant letter, the droning letter, the bread-and-butter letter of thanks, above all the letter of excuse with a profusion of elaborate detail that carried politeness, sometimes, to the verge of insult.

Those who embark on the more than 600 pages of the first volume of letters have been warned. What sustains one for quite a while is the hope of discerning, to at least one correspondent, frankness. But the wearing of masks is so adroit, so customary, so resourceful—the resourcefulness has been underrated by some critics—that the hope is always frustrated.

A good example is the correspondence with Richard Aldington. It begins promisingly in 1919 with Aldington confessing, "I dislike your poetry very much; it is over-intellectual and afraid of those essential emotions which make poetry." Two years later Eliot strikes back, at the poetry of Aldington's estranged but still admired wife, H. D.: "fatiguingly monotonous . . . many words should be expunged and many phrases amended . . . the Hellenism lacks vitality; and also morally, I find a neurotic carnality which I dislike." This whets the appetite: at last, hard-hitting exchanges inside a relation of manly cordiality that could accommodate such differences. Aldington after all, though a bad poet and (we are told) a thuggish sort of fellow, had gone to the war, and while at the front he had been cuckolded by high-minded civilians of both sexes; with him, perhaps, Eliot could afford to come clean. But no,

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doubts and dissimulations and reservations g[illegible]ther. It comes as no surprise that in 1931, because of publications by Aldington, the relationship is severed for good. Of course, in this case Eliot may have been betrayed; but in the context of letters to others, Eliot's hail-fellow-well-met tone to Aldington comes over as false and cagey. Both were betrayers. Perhaps both of them knew it.

TWENTY-FIVE years ago, Hugh Kenner noted how zealously Eliot played the part of the London clubman, and would have persuaded us that this was just another of the masks that the poet hid behind, intimating in his solicitousness about what cheese to take from the cheeseboard his profoundly ironical perception of how trivial such preoccupations were. As a clubman of sorts, I can testify that, if this is a mask, it is a mask that all London clubmen wear, though some are more aware of mask-wearing than others. The mask had grown to Eliot's face, if indeed (as one began to doubt) there was any ace behind the mask to begin with. Eliot's eager dexterity in putting on masks surely had a lot to do with the worldly success that he, more than any other modernist poet, achieved. The non-English may exult in how completely he succeeded in beating the English at their mask-wearing game. But what has this to do with the great poet's bearing witness to his age, and to the nature of the unchangeable human condition in that age?

What emerges from Eliot's correspondence through these years is the keenness and the energy with which he promoted himself—and this under the crippling disadvantages of penury, of a mysteriously but chronically sick wife, and a nine-to-five job. His launching and maintaining of *The Criterion* reveal a hardheaded man, driving himself hard, with a clear eye for the main chance in an unpromising situation. If we have had an idea of Eliot in these years as simply the grateful recipient of advice and assistance, that idea must go out the window. Eliot was helping himself, with tenacity and enterprise, and would on occasion provide firm and worldly advice, even to unlikely and mutinous loners like Wyndham Lewis. If at crucial points he took advice from Pound, he lived through the consequences on his own account, and knew when to reject Pound's advice, for instance about *The Criterion*. He kept his head, and kept it above water, in a world of letters tough-and more relentless than we can easily

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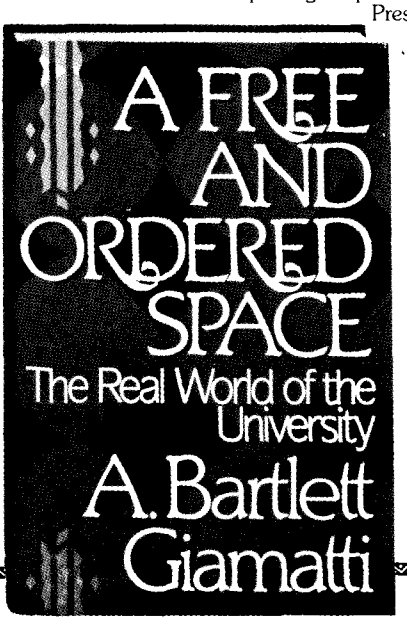

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imagine now, when the world of print counts for so much less.

The older Eliot, the famous and famously Christian Eliot, is a lot less attractive. In 1957 his sudden and furtive marriage to a woman 38 years his junior knocked the last plank of self-esteem from under Emily Hale and Mary Trevelyan. By that time, it may be said, he was at least no longer commonplace. Which is true. Thirty or more years of adulation and fame had stiffened his proclivities into a tetchy and invulnerable carapace. But the springs and the motives of his behavior remain predictable, in a way that Lyndall Gordon brings out without meaning to, when she harps on Eliot's New England heritage. There remains, to be sure, another perspective altogether, in terms of the poetry rather than the history of ideas or the history of regional cultures. In that perspective, we could find good reasons why Eliot chose Baudelaire rather than Edgar Allan Poe to stand for the poet as diabolist. But so many books have been written about Eliot in such literary-historical terms that it's high time we had disenchanting images of him in more mundane perspectives. More mundane means also more humane.

DONALD DAVIE

Donald Davie is emeritus professor of humanities at Vanderbilt University. His most recent book of poems is *To Scorch or Freeze: Poems About the Sacred* (University of Chicago Press).

PRINCIPALS, PRINCIPLES

Our Children & Our Country: Improving America's Schools and Affirming the Common Culture by William Bennett

(Simon and Schuster, 238 pp., $19.95)

A Free and Ordered Space: The Real World of the University by A. Bartlett Giamatti

(W. W. Norton, 306 pp., $19.95)

A careful reader of the speeches of William Bennett and A. Bartlett Giamatti will note that they agree on much more than meets the ear. In these two collections of speeches delivered in office, the former secretary of education and the former president of Yale express allegiance to many of the same goals for education in America. Beneath their agreements, however, lies a deep difference, which is reflected in their rhetoric—a difference in the education in which they engage in these books, education by their own example.

Bennett and Giamatti concur on many of the educational "basics." Bennett emphasizes the need for schools to inculcate moral character, but he also defends the teaching of critical reasoning. ("Well, if we're going to give up critical judgment, we'd better give up the game of education altogether.") Although Giamatti emphasizes the commitment of a liberal university to critical reasoning and intellectual diversity, he also recognizes the need for shared values within a liberal university, values that create the "ordered space" within which intellectual freedom can flourish.

Bennett criticizes the relativistic connotations of the term "values," citing a friend who "once said, when he hears the word 'values' he reaches for his Sears catalog." But Bennett uses the term as often as Giamatti. Bennett notes, for example, the "need for schools to transmit social and political values." Like most liberals, Giamatti treats the values of honesty, rational inquiry, and mutual respect not as matters of personal preference, but as the essential moral foundation for a good university and a just society. Both educators insist on the need not only to teach, but also to enforce, the values on which democracy depends.

These are not the only disputes that dissolve on close reading. Bennett suggests that liberals (or "certain elite circles in the academy and the media") have "a fastidious disdain for the public expression of religious values." But Giamatti is a counterexample to the rule for which Bennett offers no examples. Giamatti's concluding "Coda" centers around the interpretation of two religious texts (the Revelation given to Saint John on the Isle of Patmos and a saying of Rabbi Tarphon in *Pirke Avot*, "You are not required to complete the work, but neither are you free to desist from it").

Giamatti does disdain, however, the public expression of a particular kind of religious value. For "those who presume to know what God alone knows," Giamatti reserves his harshest words:

> From the maw of this "morality" rise the tax-exempt Savonarolas who believe they, and they alone, possess the truth. There is no debate, no discussion, no dissent. They know. There is only one set of overarching political and spiritual and social beliefs; whatever view does not conform to these views is by definition relativistic, negative, secular, immoral, against the family, anti-free enterprise, un-American. What nonsense.

Bennett seems less troubled by the Moral Majority, but he, too, criticizes those who would convert this country into a "Christian Sparta." Bennett even rests his criticism upon a principle of neutrality that lies at the core of contemporary liberalism: "Not content to bring religious values into the public square, they would deny the government's constitutional obligation to be neutral among particular religious communities."

Sometimes even the most acrimonious dispute appears to be largely rhetorical. One of Bennett's "fundamental convictions is this: there is an extraordinary gap between the rhetoric and the reality of American higher education." Bennett accuses the spokesmen of higher education of speech that is "often exceedingly pious, self-congratulatory, and suffused with an aura of moral superiority." Giamatti's criticism of higher education is no less severe. He decries "the gap between grand, traditional, and almost wholly unexamined professions of high principle, lofty mission, and splendid purpose, and institutional behavior that is often venal, self-serving, and shoddy." Whereas Bennett directs his critical energy toward the courses in Harvard's core curriculum, which he misleadingly suggests have been "plucked" from pre-existing departmental courses, Giamatti provides better evidence for a more sweeping criticism.

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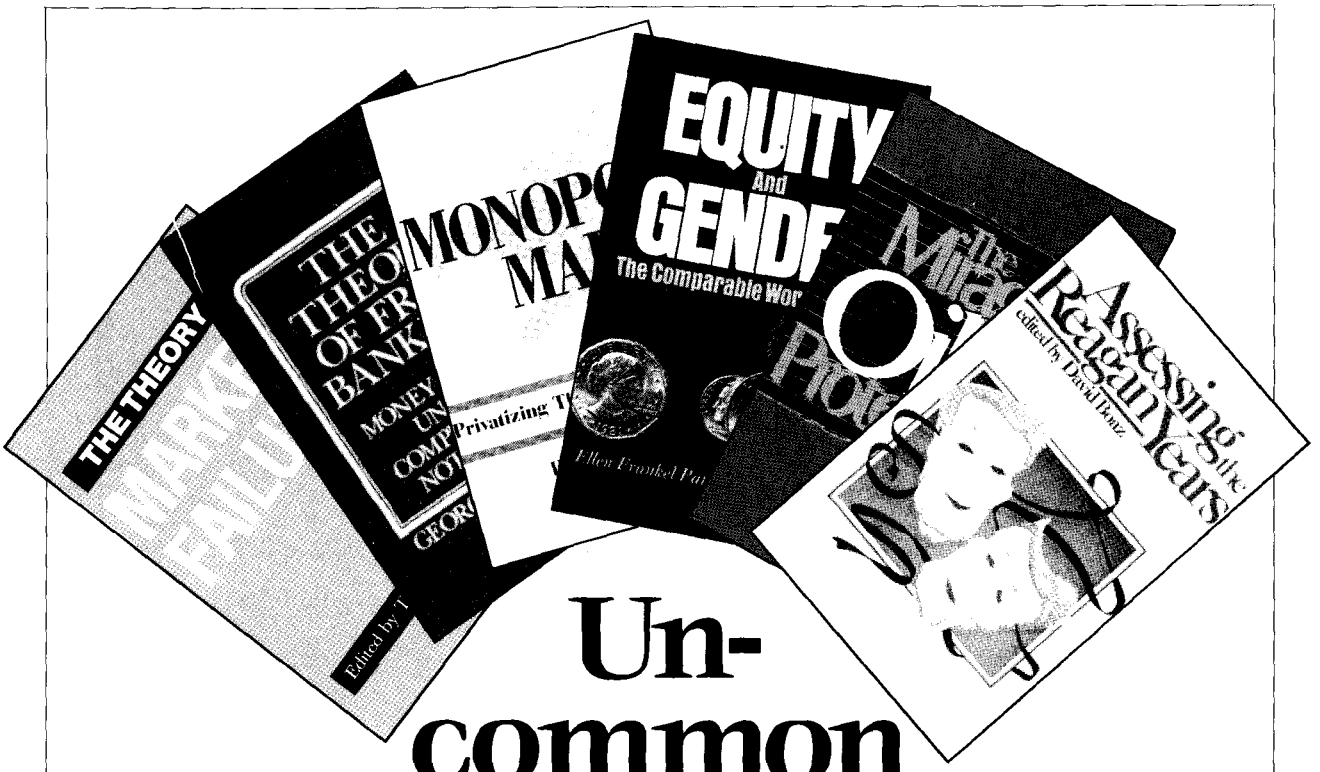

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WERE BENNETT and Giamatti both to speak more about specific policies, however, their goals for American education would seem much less similar. Their agreements on abstract principles conceal disagreements over the actual implications of those principles. But their most fundamental difference, also concealed by their agreement on abstract principle, is reflected in their rhetoric, in their styles of speaking. Bennett's style is simple and declarative, Giamatti's ruminative and suggestive.

Bennett speaks as plainly as the truths he wishes to affirm: "Allow me to emphasize the obvious: not all systems of government are equal. Some forms of government are better than others; some are more just, less oppressive, more open, less resistant to needed reforms. And first among these forms of government is the liberal democracy of the West." On the philosophy of his model principal: "I like Joe Clark's philosophy: Accept no incompetence. Period." On the subject of AIDS: "It is time that we tell the truth and face the facts about AIDS. The truth is this: AIDS kills."

Giamatti has fewer periods.

> Such education occurs when you pursue knowledge because you are motivated to experience and absorb what comes of thinking—thinking about the traditions of our common human heritage in all its forms, thinking about new patterns or designs in what the world proffers today—whether in philosophic texts or financial markets or chemical combinations—thinking in order to create new knowledge that others will then explore.

Giamatti imagines the challenge a career-oriented student might make to the pursuit of learning for its own sake: "That is very touching, that is all very well, but . . . [w]hat is the earthly use of all this kind of education later on, in the practical, real world?" His answer defies summary, but in full it has a logic, and persuasive power:

> The world will not provide you with sustenance or employment. You will have to work for it. I am instead speaking of another dimension of your lives, the dimension of your spirit that will last longer than a job, that will outlast a profession, that will represent by the end of your time on earth the sum of your human significance. That is the dimension of human existence represented by the mind unfettered, "freely ranging onley within the Zodiack of his owne wit," as the old poet said. There is not greater power a human being can develop for the individual's or for the public's good.

Rhetorics shape our expectations of public deliberation. Giamatti's rhetoric aims at inclusion. It is designed to convince those with whom he disagrees. He doesn't assume that reasoned rhetoric always persuades even reasonable people. If I fail to convince you, Giamatti says to skeptical students, "nevertheless I welcome you to a liberal education's rigorous and demanding pleasures." Bennett's declarative rhetoric, typified by his repeated assertions that the truth is understood by "the American people" rather than the "educational establishment" or "elite circles," aims to unite the faithful by exclusion. In the name of anti-elitism, Bennett labels millions of American citizens—notably liberals, members of teachers' unions, residents of Brookline and Cambridge—un-American. In a piece called "The Future of American Conservatism," Bennett offers a rationale for his rhetoric: "While contemporary liberalism has moved away from—in some cases, even against—the mainstream of American political life, today's conservatism is at home with the common sense and the common beliefs of the American people."

Such rhetoric may be politically effective, it may rally conservatives, but it does not meet any respectable test of truth. Many conservatives are less "at home" than liberals with the mainstream belief that government should be neutral among particular communities, nonreligious as well as religious. If Bennett means to narrow the principle of neutrality to exclude non-religious communities, then the belief, whether or not it is common, is not commonsensical; nor is it morally defensible.

Bennett invokes philosophy carelessly

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when he cites John Locke's view that "those that by their atheism undermine and destroy all religion can have no pretense of religion whereupon to challenge the privilege of a toleration." He fails to mention that Locke also excluded Catholics from the privilege of toleration. Liberals since Locke have secularized his argument for toleration, making it more inclusive. I doubt that Bennett's less liberal rhetoric reflects the common sense of the American people on this matter. But if it does, we should be all the more critical of it, and grateful for liberals like Giamatti who wholeheartedly defend toleration in the spirit as well as the name of "openness, honesty, intellectual inquiry for the truth, and mutual respect."

BENNETT'S populist rhetoric dangerously exaggerates the extent and the significance of the agreements that bind Americans together. Most Americans, including most liberals and members of the educational establishment, agree on certain values, such as religious toleration and the importance of cultivating moral character in children. Yet they often disagree on what educational policies best manifest these values. These disagreements are legitimately the stuff of partisan politics. But partisan politics oversteps the bounds of what Giamatti calls civility when it cloaks its policies in the language of absolute truth, which one can dispute only at the risk of being labeled un-American (or "far, far, far to the left of the views of most Americans"). Civility does not demand agreement, gentility, or even politeness. It asks for mutual respect and reasoned argument among people who have reasonable differences of opinion.

Consider the controversy over teaching moral character. Let's assume that Bennett is correct: most Americans accept the principle that "in education the development of intellect and character go hand in hand." Neither our agreement with Bennett, nor the philosophical soundness of the principle, extends to the partisan policy of permitting voluntary prayer in public schools, which is what Bennett unsuccessfully championed, on these same general grounds, on behalf of the Reagan administration.

Liberals often oppose voluntary prayer in public schools for reasons precisely the opposite of those implied by Bennett's rhetoric. They don't dispute the abstract principle that schools should cultivate good character. They simply

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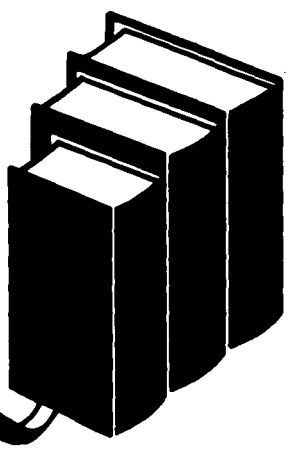

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argue that by asking children to pray in public, public schools are likely to cultivate bad character. Some children will feel pressured into praying to someone in whom, or something in which, they do not believe, or do not understand. (What is a teacher supposed to say when some students ask to whom and for what they should be praying?) Other children will be regarded (by their peers or teachers) as un-American because they do not believe in the existence of God or in the efficacy of prayer, even though nobody has shown that either belief is necessary for good citizenship or character.

Many liberals do not, therefore, "fastidiously disdain" religion, as Bennett suggests. Liberals believe that the most effective means of respecting religion is to prevent governments from overstepping the bounds of their citizens' consciences and their own competence. Whether or not liberals are right on this matter, Bennett's dismissal of liberalism as relativistic and irreligious is clearly wrong, for the strongest liberal arguments against voluntary prayer depend on the very values that Bennett accuses liberals of disdaining.

BENNETT DOES start off on the right track. Honesty, courage, kindness, compassion, loyalty, modesty, respect for the rights of others are indeed among the many virtues schools should try to develop in children. But then he offers simplistic solutions to difficult problems, which he variously labels "what works in education," "the common sense and common beliefs of the American people," the "truth." Here is a typical example of Bennett's directive teaching. We know what works in education; teaching by example works; schools must therefore hire teachers who exemplify good moral character; and parents must pay attention to who is teaching their children in sex education classes. Bennett says nothing more explicit about what parents or teachers should do. If we must find teachers who teach by example, then we presumably must find out about the sexual lives of the teachers who teach our children about sex.

Here is a truth about sex according to Bennett: "To the girls, teachers . . . must not be afraid to use words like 'modesty' and 'chastity.'" Bennett adds that "the boys need to hear things too." But teachers need not be so courageous as to use words like "modesty" and "chastity"

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around boys. Now, what kind of truth is this? Where are the reasoned arguments addressed to reasonable people who criticize an education that selectively cultivates its values, that inculcates modesty and chastity in girls but not in boys? Bennett must know that the double standard is no longer the common sense of many Americans; but he doesn't bother to answer its critics.

Instead he cloaks partisan policy in the rhetoric of universal truth. *Of course* character education is "a matter of common sense," but the specific policies that Bennett supports in its name are not. Bennett has no patience for the moral and empirical controversies that surround specific suggestions. He does not appreciate how such controversies, patiently pursued, can educate citizens in democratic discourse, and serve the nonpartisan political cause of cultivating mutual respect among citizens.

THE DIFFERENCES between Bennett and Giamatti cannot be explained away by the requirements of their respective institutional roles. Giamatti's style reflects a commitment to the open and reasoned discourse at the heart of a truly liberal university, but not every university president speaks in a way that reflects a commitment to open and reasoned discourse. Bennett's rhetoric reflects a partisan attempt to attach the conservative label to a set of nonpartisan education ideals, but a secretary of education need not adopt the partisan language and politics of the administration that appoints him. Bennett's predecessor, T. H. Bell, did not. Perhaps Bell would have remained in office longer if he had been more partisan; but surely he would not have accomplished as much. It was Bell, after all, not Bennett, who commissioned the report (*A Nation at Risk*) that sparked the recent revival of interest in educational reform.

Many educators who otherwise disagree with Bennett's policies give him credit for keeping education in the news. Has Bennett thereby helped American education? Bennett brought more critical attention to institutions of higher education, for example, than they would otherwise have attracted, and American colleges and universities certainly can benefit from being criticized. But Bennett directed his criticism almost entirely at two aspects of higher education—tuitions at the most selective colleges and universities, and their curriculum in the humanities and social sciences. This affects a very small portion (less than ten percent) of college students.

More troubling than Bennett's selective concern for the most affluent and the best educated is his selective use of evidence. Bennett's most publicized claims display a disregard for the whole truth, for that standard to which he holds the educational establishment but from which he evidently exempts himself. Bennett claims that colleges and universities are "ripping off" their students, but he does not discuss the causes of rising costs, such as expanding career and counseling services for students, modernizing facilities for scientific research, and raising faculty salaries that fell far behind inflation in the 1970s. Nor does he mention that high tuitions enable the most selective colleges to provide full financial aid for poor and lower-middle-class students. Criticizing a report of the National Research Council of the National Academy of Sciences, Bennett claims that "there is no evidence that making contraceptive methods more available is the surest strategy for preventing pregnancy—to say nothing about preventing sexual activity." But there *is* evidence for the Council's conclusion: in other countries, such as Sweden, where teenagers have greater access to contraception, the pregnancy rate and the rate of abortion among teenagers is significantly lower than in the United States. (The Council did not claim, of course, that contraception was the surest way to prevent sexual activity.)

THE SECRETARY of education is not alone responsible for running any schools, dictating any curriculum, or even deciding how much the federal government should spend on education. Of course, he may be partly or indirectly responsible for all of these aspects of American education, and more; but he is most singularly and directly responsible for how well he teaches by example. Whether or not we agree with the policies Bennett defends, we should be disturbed by the way he defends them: selectively citing evidence, cloaking partisan policies in the rhetoric of self-evident truth, sidestepping careful argument, insinuating that millions of citizens who disagree with those policies are un-American, that their points of view not worthy of serious consideration.

Liberalism is on the defensive these days. Politicians are avoiding the label "liberal" like the plague. But the plague

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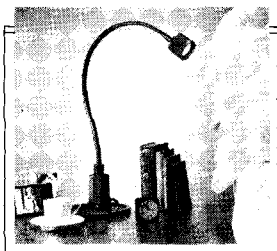

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is already upon them (and us) if they are afraid to stand up for a virtue distinctive to liberal democracy: mutual respect among reasonable people who disagree, a respect that is exemplified by the willingness and ability to engage in reasoned and informed discussion of our political differences. There are many things wrong with American education. Some of them are called to our attention by both Bennett and Giamatti; some are ignored by one and deplored by the other. But the most significant difference between these two leaders of education is that, by the examples of their speech, Giamatti enhances, and Bennett erodes, the distinctive virtue of liberal democracy.

AMY GUTMANN

Amy Gutmann is professor of politics at Princeton University and author of *Democratic Education* (Princeton University Press).

SURE

Contingencies of Value: Alternative Perspectives for Critical Theory by Barbara Herrnstein Smith

(Harvard University Press, 229 pp., $22.50)

A relativist has been defined as someone who says, "I mean it, if you know what I mean." The sentence, as spoken, puts Barbara Herrnstein Smith in a fighting mood—not because she thinks it is wrong, but because she believes that its mingled certainty and doubt express a truth that ought to be part of common sense, right down to the comma. Smith's training was in literary studies, but her recent work has brought her closer to philosophy, and *Contingencies of Value* defends a thesis that may have to be called hard-line relativism: quite a different thing from the mere belief that all knowledge is shaped by a perspective. If my friend has just converted to Christian Science, has sustained physical injury, and now confronts a medical and moral dilemma, I, taking differences of perspective into account, may tell him that his way of thinking is doubtless as good for him as mine is for me. But that is not yet relativism. In the same spot, the true relativist will have been so impressed by the sheer differentness of this friend's needs, and the whole personal and cultural economy that generated those needs, that his advice is limited to a rehearsal of his own motives for doing what he does.

The foregoing example bears on relativism in a question about morality. Smith's book is mostly about relativism in aesthetics. But by the end, she has extended the argument to cover morality and the general theory of value. The conclusion at which she steadily aims is: "There is no *bottom* bottom line anywhere." Every judgment we produce is contingent, that is to say, dependent on other factors. By showing how aesthetic judgments, in particular, are necessarily conditioned by prejudice, vanity, and interest (above all, by "cognitive interest"), Smith hopes to divest culture of the prestige it enjoys as a somehow autonomous realm. If her argument is persuasive, the effect will be to make us think of aesthetic standards as part of nothing grander than a "will to epistemic self-maintenance—a *conservatism* that may be even deeper than that of politics." Such protective instincts have no impersonal or objective foundation, and they owe their meaning to the way of life that happens to be favored by a party, sect, interest group, or more-than-aesthetic culture.

Smith launches her defense of contingency in a disarming way. The first pages of the book tell how, for a great many years, she taught Shakespeare's sonnets—all the while continuing to work on them as an editor, annotator, and critic. Looking back on her record of response to the poems, what chiefly struck her was the enormous variability it showed over time, and the intense conviction it nevertheless carried at certain moments. She went back and forth with lots of poems: one temporarily convincing reading ("a lovely reading ... when I believe it") might rescue a poem she had formerly disdained, another might spoil a poem she had long admired and cherished. She came to know, in a hallucinatory fashion, poems that were not in fact in the text, and accidentally blotted from her memory poems that were in fact in the text. Anyone who has ever read, and reconsidered, a single work a half dozen times or more will have shared something of Barbara Smith's acquaintance with these phenomena, though it is fair to add that hers does seem to have been an extreme case. The point about her confession, however, is that it strengthens the argument for total contingency. How true, she implies, must contingency-of-value be for an entire culture, if it has this kind of grip on the life of an individual reader. Where a larger number of variables exist, we may expect still more variability.

One cannot help feeling that Smith's record typifies the experience only of a small subset of the impassioned and inquisitive readers alive today. Many of the symptoms she describes are related to the peculiarly rewarding, but also peculiarly repetitious, work of the modern professional exegete. There is something unnaturally depressive about the routines of teaching or, as Smith says, "professing" the same poem year after year, without any letup for two decades or more. In the circumstances, an occasional manic interpretation may have a rousing effect. But that is not the only way out. Much healthier was Nietzsche's decision, after years of professing Wagner, to turn from the subject entirely and celebrate *Carmen* for its cheerfulness, its dumb vitality as an antidote to Wagner. Anyway, given the predicament of the academic specialist, it seems wrong to draw a general inference about the reading of intelligent people who do not happen to teach what they read. These last, it is true, form a class of persons whose very existence Smith is inclined to doubt. It is possible that she has merely fallen out of the habit of talking with them.

From motives that reflect honor in equal parts on her conscience and her professionalism, Smith has not allowed herself many Nietzschean "antidotes." Her book is written from the classroom and the think tank; its characters are teachers, students, and more teachers: from them, she extrapolates a culture. And yet, as a historical account of contingency, the book has no pretensions. After the sonnet-reading anecdote, it offers not a single story of the reception of a poem, novel, or work of any kind by a sequence of readers who took for

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granted disparate values—just the sort of demonstration that the argument seems to require, if it means to be taken historically and not metaphysically. In Los Angeles, there is a radio station that is "all news, all the time." This book is all theory all the time.

WELL, but what is theory, in this sense of the word? A way of talking about meaning or the possibility of meaning in the moral sciences, to a mixed audience of readers across the disciplines of literature, anthropology, politics, philosophy, and the law. The strength of the community lies in the scope and the generosity of its interests. The weakness lies in the questionable competence of any given member of it to understand what is at stake in the vocabulary, the history, all the tacit conventions of argument that another member, who lives and thinks some distance away, may take as a thing that goes without saying.

Here is a sample of how Smith talks to these readers:

> The epistemological conundrum, however (that is, the puzzle of how to find out how The Other's meat tastes to *him*), remains uncrackable, and other questions are raised for normative cultural criticism and its associated pedagogic and missionary imperatives, including whether the quality of other people's lives or cultures is appropriately or usefully measured by the extent to which either the objects of their experience duplicate our own or their articulation of those experiences are [sic] produced in the idioms of our own cultural discourses.

Less ponderously, this means that since you can never know why some people like some things, but you want to respect those people anyway, you might as well give up trying to judge their different taste in your own language.

Here is another representative passage:

> Since there are no functions performed by artworks that may be specified as generically unique and also no way to distinguish "rewards" provided by art-related experiences or behavior from those provided by innumerable other kinds of experience and behavior, any distinctions drawn between "aesthetic" and "nonaesthetic" (or "extra-aesthetic") value must be regarded as fundamentally problematic.

Bentham said it faster: "Quantity of pleasure being equal, push-pin is as good as poetry."

I have chosen these passages not only to illustrate a certain style of delivery, but also because they sketch the main features of Smith's polemic. She has, in fact, taken over from Bentham the metaphor of "cost-benefit analysis," and like him she uses it to discredit the notion that aesthetic judgment can be distinct from moral or political calculations. The affiliation is less odd than it looks. It was Bentham and James Mill, long before Marx and Engels, who first exposed the liberal assumption of disinterestedness as a mask of class interest. In the same iconoclastic spirit, Smith wants to show that the aesthetic pleasure of the connoisseur is in no way superior to the sensational or torpid pleasure of the philistine. When we exalt the first kind of pleasure over the second, we only show our unwillingness to countenance "The Other" whose interests are foreign to ours.

Her real target of course is the belief in defensible standards. Hume wrote an important essay, "Of the Standard of Taste," and Smith takes several, unsatisfactory, passing shots at his argument, often promising to deal in a later chapter with the bits she has not yet accounted for. But Hume was offering a skeptical defense of such a standard. By contrast, Smith proposes a skeptical refutation, along the following lines:

> (A) There is no such thing as an impersonal, or unsituated, judgment, any more than there is a viewless viewpoint. Every judgment comes from a person in a situation.

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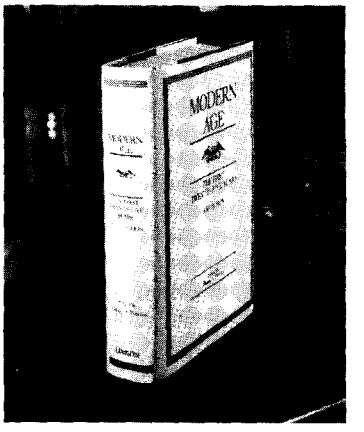

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THEIR FATHER

I won't say it wasn't my idea.
I think of Hansel's first attempt,
pockets dribbling those white stones,
a tenuous trail to the home
that had ceased to hold him.
I was alone with two children
at the edge of a great wood.

Like that a man can be a fool
when it comes to a woman.
She used to beg for love-making.
Her anger was more
than I had courage for;
her eyes, soft beneath me,
could turn in a frenzy.

When they returned,
following the moon-pebbled path
I vowed never. There are stones
in my belly; they rattle
in my dreams.

The next time Gretel held my hand.
Hansel held back to watch
a cat on the roof. If I'd known
of his scant offerings,
could I have left them?

The time they were away is silent
but for the sawing of inward anger.
I dreamed of birds,
swooping down on their trail.
My wife ate and ate
but grew thin in front of me.

I did nothing. When she died
I drew inside the cabin,
shutters closed, a cage.
I lived in the smallest gestures:
sweeping, building a fire.
I moved as little as possible.

If I had the courage
I would enter the woods,
but I clung to cabin habits.

Gretel, with her apron full of pearls,
has brought us a flock of geese.
Each morning I scatter crumbs for them;
Gretel likes it when I help:
either that, she says, or when I stay
out of her way.

GWEN STRAUSS

(B) With persons and situations come interests. Every settled evaluation of a work of art flows from particular interests, and it serves ends of some importance to those interests. This is emphatically true of the "permanent" value that is associated with canonical works.

(C) Having felt the weight of these observations, one will want to detach oneself from all persuasive assertions of the form "X is better than Y." For, in seeking to inculcate a belief about value, one appeals to nothing beyond habit and the usual tacit supports of value, the authority of which is always relative to our own time, place, and situation.

It can be said for Smith's intellectual courage that what she proposes is not an easy way to live. Even in the classroom, a tolerance like hers runs the risk of uprooting complacent belief only to supplant it with complacent unbelief. But considered strictly as a piece of theory, the argument leaves two questions standing. It is not clear how we get from (A) to (B), and it is not clear how we get from (B) to (C).

Thus, from the fact that every work and every judgment—the reader's and the writer's alike—*emerge from* certain interests, it does not follow that a given work or judgment must accordingly *serve* the same interests. That Ur-canonical text, the Sermon on the Mount, emerged from the lives of the early Christians. It can now serve the utterly opposite interests of Archbishop O'Connor and the Liberation Theologians. Still, says Smith, no canonical work will remain canonical for long, unless it is found to answer the demands of some "establishment," or perhaps a meta-establishment that persists over time. Are we therefore to project, for the present instance, an establishment of Catholic-American humanity, which unites at a higher level the demands of both far-right and hard-left interpreters? Such a solution is certainly possible, and just as certainly vacuous. Consider, again, a critical remark like the following by Shaw: "There has really never been a more monstrous imposition perpetrated than the imposition of the limitation of Paul's soul upon the soul of Jesus." A Protestant said this. But we may take him merely to stand for a single reader, among others. Before Smith can be credited on the problem of interest generally, she will have to say what establishment such a statement comes out of, and what establishment it assists.

YET SUPPOSE we admit the interest-serving character of all judgments of value, as described. It does not follow that we shall have only an arbitrary authority for saying "X is better than Y." Two readers, each confronting the other for the first time, may do well to assume a modest tone. But their politeness has no implications whatever for the trust we can still choose to place in a qualified judge. Such a judge is distinguished by a knowledge of the goods internal to a practice—those goods that do not make a novel's worth exactly correspond to its sales, or an article's worth exactly correspond to the journal in which it was published. The judgments that follow will only count if one believes that there *are* goods independent of money and prestige; independent, too, of the claims of universal rights and equal representation in a culture. Smith, one feels, would want to deny that there are such internal goods anywhere, but she does not address the question at all directly.

Hume did. Because he also shares some premises with Barbara Smith, it is worth saying a few more words for his conception of taste. Hume thought there were conventions of seeing, and understanding, a work of art, on which so general an agreement could be obtained that the resulting judgments would seem "natural." Appreciation was therefore an art that could be taught. That much, Smith in a charitable mood can allow. But she thinks that where the arts are concerned, the whole logic of appreciation has been mystified by the long renown a canonical work by definition has already enjoyed. To give a fair hearing to both critics, we ought to look at a pursuit less easily mystified: say, the taste for croquet. There are things a good fan knows to watch out for, that the casual tea-sipping onlooker can scarcely per-

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ceive: why, for instance, it is sometimes advisable to blast through a wicket your different-colored rival, even though that may seem on the face of it a rather tediously "gentle" tactic. Now, Hume believed the standard of the experienced fan, or the experienced reader, was decisive for the pursuits to which they respectively belong. Smith's reply here is a rhetorical question. Who are *we*, after all (since our nature is only convention, our pleasure a conditioned and not a timeless custom, our viewpoint specific and nontranscendental)—who are we to dismiss the person that judges either the game or the work quite differently?

There is no Humean answer to this question. He did not anticipate a culture so divided against itself that anybody would even want to ask it. Within such a culture, it will seem a highly significant fact

> that there are many people in the world who are not—or are not yet, or choose not to be—among the orthodoxly educated population of the West: people who do not encounter Western classics at all or who encounter them under cultural and institutional conditions very different from those of American and European college professors and their students.

Yet, by itself, the fact does not point a moral. It would only begin to do so if good evidence were available that the reputation of certain Western books was a substantial cause of the economic misery and political oppression in the world today. Smith stops far short of this. To the Western, "orthodoxly educated," academic and professional reader, careering from proprietary regard to a proprietary disdain for culture, her message seems at last to be: distrust yourself.

A JACKET NOTE on *Contingencies of Value* says that the author is president of the Modern Language Association for 1988. From that report alone concerning her interests and situation, one plausible deduction, hardly a polemical one by her standards, is that Smith brings news agreeable rather than alarming to the profession of college and university teachers of literature, in the current state of their beliefs.

The profession today may not quite tell its members: "Do what you like." But, in many voices and on various occasions, it does impartially assure them: "We cannot now or ever formulate the rule by which to deny you the means to execute your probably absurd but possibly fruitful inquiry. Good luck." For the indulgent status quo, the only indigestible ideas come, on the one hand, from those who make a clean sweep of culture for the sake of declared political aims, and on the other from those who trust themselves, and not their institutions, to supply fresh reasons for doing what they do. Both types are aware of contingency but they are not inclined to talk about it much. They know what they believe; one perspective is real to them.

DAVID BROMWICH

David Bromwich teaches English at Yale University and is the author of *Hazlitt: The Mind of a Critic* (Oxford University Press).

TRB, *from page 4*

one person at a time, and people with names like Dukakis are actually running for president, a merger with Canada would add millions of citizens with sturdy names like Mulroney and Turner, who speak English with hardly a trace of an accent, and whose native cuisine is virtually spice-free. Look for Canadian restaurants as the new food trend in New York.

—*Free traders*, of course, should appreciate the addition of a new market the size of California to the U.S. economy. Protectionist sentiments would melt away with the border. Floridians and North Dakotans happily do business together without the need for tariffs, quotas, voluntary restraints, or other economic prophylactics. Now they could enjoy similar unprotected capitalist pleasures with Saskatchewanians and Nova Scotians.

—*Ecologists, ZPG running-out-of-room types, etc.* would love the acquisition of a land mass larger than the continental United States with one-tenth of the population. Our ratio of people per acre—a key statistic for the overpopulation-minded—would instantly be cut in half. Those misanthropes who feel that Montana has been spoiled because you can no longer spend a week without running into another human being or three could adjourn to northern Alberta and Manitoba, there to await the inevitable spreading blight.

From almost any point of view, then, the advantages to the United States of merging with Canada are overwhelming. And the disadvantages? Gordon Lightfoot records are already on sale throughout the United States, and Peter Jennings is thoroughly established at ABC. We've paid the price; now is the time to reap the benefit.

But we must act quickly, before Canadians resolve their neurosis on their own. Anti-U.S. propaganda during the recent election campaign mixed two contradictory themes: fear of U.S. power and a desire not to be seen as rats swimming toward a sinking ship. "Is it forward looking for Canada at this time," asked an influential pamphlet, "to be making trade commitments to the U.S. when all indicators show that the U.S. is declining as the economic world leader?"

We'd better complete this seduction before we go totally bald and paunchy. Right now, though, they still want it. You know they want it. Hey, you great, gorgeous piece of frozen northland. Come to Uncle.

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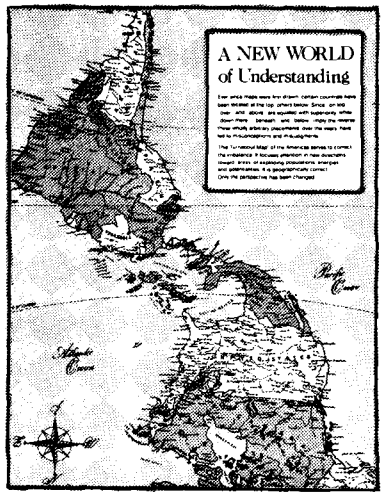
Corrective perspective



RUN-OF-THE-MILL maps place the U.S. above. Since "upper" is equated with "superior," this has bred misconceptions and mischief. The Turnabout Map of the Americas offers a corrective perspective.

"I'm having it framed" — Robert MacNeil
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WASHINGTON DIARIST

Bun Floss

FOLLOWING THE Geraldo Rivera "watch out for flying chairs" incident there was a deep belch of media concern about Trash Television. *Newsweek*, the *Washington Post*, and a few other publications ran anguished analyses. Television experts told us, grimly, what this trend says about our country. (I already knew what it said about our country—*We're stupid*—but it was fun to hear the experts say that in 25 words or more.) But now that the frenzy is over I have one question: What next? When children's television was recognized as a menace in the '70s, battle lines were formed, with groups like Action for Children's Television on one side and the Evil Saturday Morning Industry on the other. We may need battle lines again—not mere chin-rubbing about the effects of Reagan-era broadcast deregulation—because I don't think the Trash TV people were exactly shell-shocked by the barrage of think-pieces. And though you and I know Geraldo was dumb to put Roy Innis onstage with white-supremacist youths, he drew a different lesson from the experience. As he told the *National Enquirer* (and yes, I believe everything I read), "I battled hate-mongers—and won!" Once again the shameless Geraldo has auto-vindicated. Right now I'm watching his daytime show and the "topic" appears to be Male and Female Bodybuilders Lumbering Around in the Teensiest Swimsuits Imaginable. "What do you call that look?" Geraldo is asking his teensy-swimsuit guest-expert as a 250-pound man in a G-string flexes his almost fully exposed buttocks for the audience. Her reply: "That's called 'Bun Floss.' "

JUDGING BY THE press releases I receive, things are only getting worse. Qintex Entertainment Inc. just wrote to announce a new syndicated TV show, slated for September 1989 release, called "Rollergames." Check *this* out: " 'Rollergames' catapults a classic American sport [i.e., Roller Derby] into the 21st Century by adding live rock bands, hard-body athletes, high-tech graphics, form-fitting uniforms, MTV-style flash, a massive, futuristic set, and viewer participation. . . . 'Rollergames' [puts] two teams in four quarters of all fast and furious competition around a roller-coaster track complete with very imaginative obstacles that defy human odds, such as a live alligator pit, a jumping ramp, the 'Hawaiian Wave,' and a 14' Wall of Death." I'll admit I'm of two minds about this. Irresponsible me wants to be on the front row at the first "Rollergames" riot, inhaling cotton candy and tripping skaters with a broomstick. My better self hopes I'll be stopped from indulging in this mindless wallow by a Bipartisan Commission on Trash TV.

FOR THOSE OF YOU who found yourself asking, during the remembrance blizzard accompanying the 25th anniversary of JFK's assassination, "Hmm, I wonder if larger-than-life Hollywood celebrities remember where *they* were when the news came," this just in from celebrity publicist Michael Levine: "COMMENTS FROM HOLLYWOOD'S PROMINENT CELEBRITIES ON JFK . . . *Valerie Harper*: 'I distinctly remember saying, "Oh my god. It's Abraham Lincoln time." ' *Mickey Rooney*: 'I was making a picture over at Universal. . . . John F. Kennedy was one of my best friends. We first met in the elevator at the Waldorf Astoria and we spoke again later at the White House.' " And finally, famed mimic *Fred Travelana*: "I had a dream that summer that I believe was a prophecy of JFK's death. . . . The tragedy of his death at such a young age and under such complicated circumstances will march into history and be a reminder of the few short years his presence graced our lives and this nation. Johnny, we hardly knew ya." Who says celebs don't have gravitas?

YOU MAY BE wondering: Why does this guy get such neat mail and I don't? You have to work at it. The secret to keeping busy as a free-lancer is to make sure you have a steady supply of fodder clogging your mailbox. You do this by calling every worthwhile, semi-worthwhile, or fringe group you read about and asking to be put on their mailing list. I think I went too far on my last sweep, though. I called dozens of people listed in the very odd 1988-89 *Directory of Experts, Authorities & Spokespersons*, otherwise known as "The Talk Show Guest Directory." TRB let his fingers walk through these yellow pages a few weeks ago but, wisely, he didn't go near the phone. I did, and as I now realize, for many years and many changes-of-address to come I'll be hearing from a cast of unwanted pen pals that include Dr. Al Shackelford ("What could be more interesting and informative than having Dr. Al Shackelford answer questions about embalming, autopsy, organ transplants, and related topics?"), a father-daughter sex-therapy team that specializes in "interpersonal aphrodisiacs," a club made up of out-of-shape nudists whose ad suspiciously asks, "DO YOU BELIEVE THE HUMAN BODY IS OBSCENE?" and a man who argues, in a 536-page book, that he is Napoleon reincarnated.

I KNOW THESE PEOPLE are frivolous. But what most people don't understand is that there is a vast, multibillion-dollar frivolous-people economy in our country that will continue to boom at least until we reach the third millennium. Someone has to keep an eye on these guys. And contrary to traditional images you may have of cranks, the people I keep track of are not, in the main, low-budget weirdos who operate rickety printing presses in dark basements. They're high-budget weirdos. Last week I did a phone interview with a Scottish man named Benjamin Creme who claims to be (my phrase, not his) the public-relations czar for Christ, who (Creme says) has returned to Earth and is living in East London. The alleged Christ (OK, yes, I don't believe *everything* I read), known to friends as The Maitreya, is not yet ready to meet the world, but Creme is. He jets around the globe giving lectures, and his sponsor organization puts out a slick magazine and a newsletter that reports recent predictions made by The Maitreya. Some about-to-happen scoops you won't hear discussed on "The McLaughlin Group": The Thames River will overflow and flood Parliament, and Margaret Thatcher will soon leave office to give way to a young man who will "heal the wounds she has created with her policies." On the U.S. domestic front, President-elect Bush will "continue on his path towards the moderate center." Obviously, before I let Creme off the line, I had to ask him the one thing that all inquiring TNR minds want to know: "*Will* Dan Quayle grow into the job?" There was a pause, then Creme said "The Maitreya finds nothing to say about Dan Quayle." Seems accurate.

ALEX HEARD

Alex Heard is a free-lance writer in Washington.

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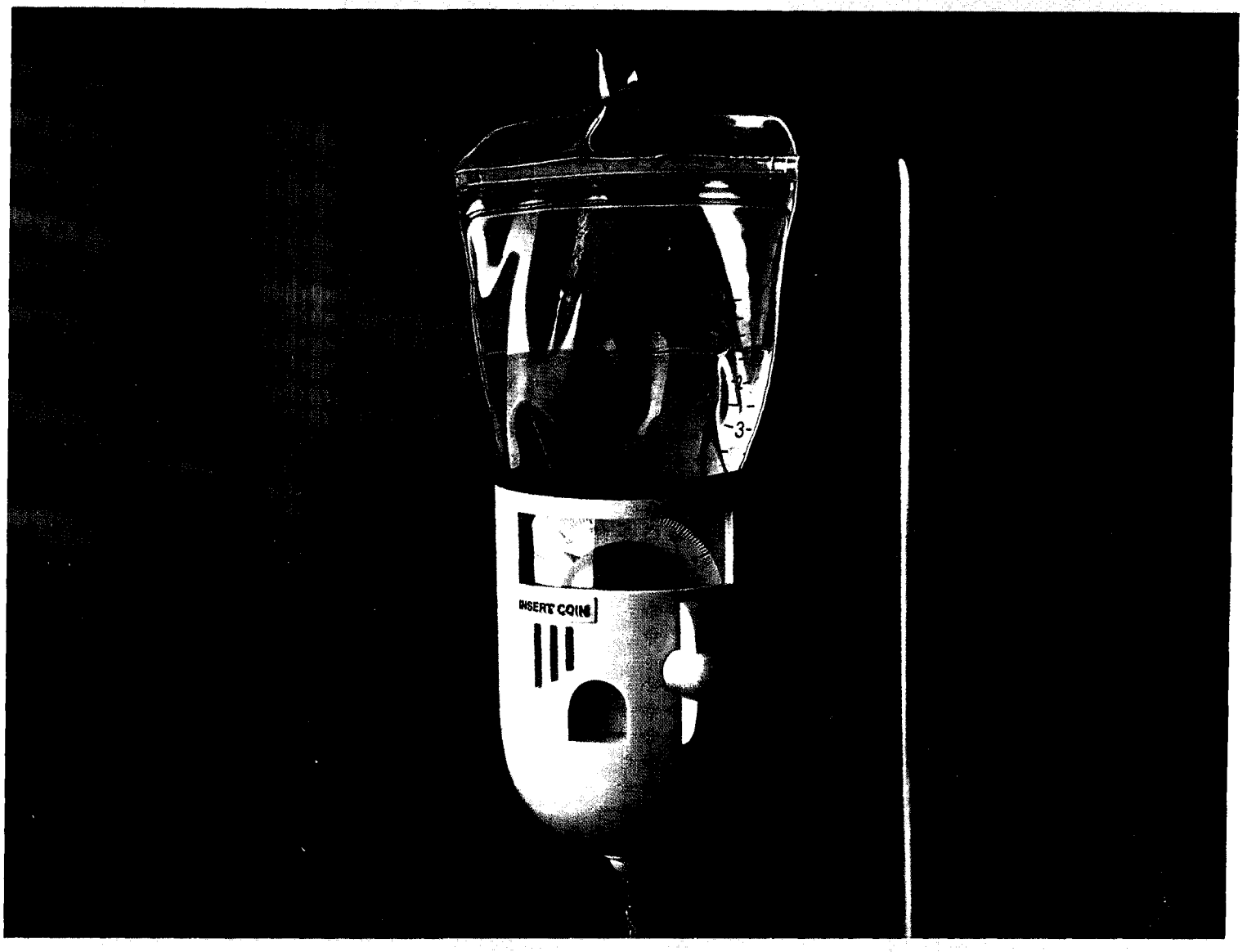

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